1: Dzhanashvili L-4 (no date) 1894 RI3 Abkhaz RI3

# Abkhazia and the Abkhaz

## /Abkhaziya i abkhaztsy/

by M. G. Dzhanashvili

Tiflis: 1894

Zapiski Kavkazskago Otdiela Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago Obshchestva /Memoirs of the Caucasus Section of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society/
Book XVI, pp. 1-59

Translated from the Russian by Aza Tugan and Elma Kasbek

Human Relations Area Files
1963

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/From the Editor/

104 In his compilatory article, "Abkhazia and the Abkhaz," which is placed in this sixteenth book of the Zapiski Otdiela, Mr. M. G. Dzhanashvili, in introducing Grusian and Askhaz words, has rendered them by means of the letters of the Russian alphabet, with the addition of two letters from the French alphabet (h and q) and one letter from the Grusian alphabet (ღ), in order to indicate the pronunciation of these words somewhat more accurately. The letter h is introduced by the author to indicate that the letter of the Russian alphabet with which it stands is to be pronounced with aspiration; the letter q is meant to indicate the deep- guttural k, and the Grusian letter ღ for the indication of a sound somewhat similar to a combination of the Russian letters t and ts /transliterated as ts'/. At the request of Mr. Dzhanashvili, who had neglected to explain this in his foreword, the editor is bringing this to the attention of the readers in order to prevent any misunderstanding which might arise during the reading of the article "Abkhazia and the Abkhaz." /Only the transliterated form of the native terms is given in the translation; where the author has used a special orthography for native terms, a note will refer the reader to the foreign text. The remainder of the editor's note has been omitted, since it is not pertinent to this article./

/1/ Abkhazia and the Abkhaz
(Ethnographic Sketch)

Foreword

101 The Abkhaz have been known since ancient times. Pliny (29-79 A. D.) calls them absilae; Arrian (100-160 A. D.) calls them apsilai (apsdai); the old Grusian chronicles refer to them as aphshili and aphsari. The Abkhaz call themselves aphsua and their country aphsn; the present-day Grusians give them various names: abkhazi, apkhazi, aphkhazi.

A 101 197 /1 cont./ From a comparison of these names it is evident that the ethnic name of the Abkhaz was formed from aps, abs, aphs, aphsh. In the languages of the Caucasus, the sounds b, p, ph, m, v, and also s and sh, frequently alternate. Here are some examples: a-m-seba = a-v-seba = ap-h-she-pha /sic/, meaning "to fill"; suli = shuri, "soul"; m-ravali = b-ravali = b-reli = ph-reli, "many"; p-rke = b-rke, etc. Thus the identity of abs, aps, aphs, and absh, aps /sic/, and aphsh is beyond doubt. What, then, does abs or aphsh mean?

A 193 First of all it must be said that in the Abkhaz language nouns are preceded by "a," corresponding to the meaning of the article le or la in the French language. In compounds this "a" is often dropped. Let us, by way of example, take identical words in the Grusian and Abkhaz languages:

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| Grusian | Abkhaz | |
|---|---|---|
| khalakhi | a-khalakh | town |
| nathla | a-nathra | baptism |
| kambechi | a-kambash | buffalo |
| nana | a-nan | mother |
| kharthueli | a-khirthua | Grusian |
| lazi | a-laz | Laz |
| kaba | a-kaba | dress |
| /2/ | | |
| kaltha | a-kaltha | tails /of a coat/ |
| kherkhi | a-khuarkhi | file |
| makrateli | a-makratil | scissors |
| kibe | a-kiba | stairs, ladder |
| gemo | a-gema | taste |
| khvabi | a-khvab | kettle |
| ugheli (Svan /Swan/: ughu) | a-ughu | yoke |
| guli (Svan:gui) | a-gu | heart |
| zari | a-zar | lament, sobbing |

G 193 Frequently the Grusian language, too, has recourse to the method of forming nouns from verbal roots, with the addition at the end of the noun of the auxiliary verb li or ari (1)

1. ari = is; in the Grusian language and

G 193 /2 cont./ in its dialects this verb appears either in the form a (e.g., katsi-a = it is a man), or in the form li (ara-li = is not), or as ri or re (akhlo-re - it is near). Of these, the form ari is the most frequent in Grusian; re, ri, ro, in Mingrel; in Svan, li, ari; and in Abkhaz, l, r.

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(3rd person singular indicative, meaning "is"). For example, deg or dgi means "stand, stand firm"; a-deg or a-dgi = stand up; a-dgi-li = solid ground, earth, dry land. In the same way, nuskhe = count, m-nuskhe-li = counting, a-m-nuskhe-li = accountant.

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So the root consists merely of phs or phsh, which in many languages of the Caucasus, including Abkhaz and Grusian, has various related meanings: river, water, moisture, soul, spring, etc. For example, in Circassian, phdze or phse means "river, water"; in Grusian phsha means "river, brook, spring-water," phshe-na or phshi-nva = breathing, sigh, smell; m-phshueni- breathing, soul, spirit; phsa = to pour, phseli = urine; in Abkhaz, aphs = soul, aphsha = wind, air; adzi /see foreign text/ = water, river, brook; adzi-khi = well; adzi-zhi = lake; amshin = sea, etc.

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It is well known that many ancient peoples got their names from the waters on whose banks they lived. We will recall, for instance, from ancient Slavic history, the Pomoryane, Polaby, Buzhane, and others (2).

2. "Settling in Europe, the Slavs gave to the rivers those most ancient names, brought over by them from the East, which originally were used as designations for river, or water in general. In this way the names Sava, Drava, Odra (Oder), Ra, Upa, Oka, Don, Dunai, Dvina, are of Aryan origin, and related forms and roots with the above-mentioned general meaning are found in

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Sanskrit; dhuni, dhūni (river) has retained its original meaning in the Caucasus, where among the Osset the forms dun and don refer to any river or body of water; among the Slavs, "Don" has become a proper name, and the form dun with the ending av has produced "Dunav," and then "Dunai." The word "Dunai," which serves as the proper name of the well-known river /the Danube/, is also still used as a name for all kinds of rivers, large and small. Examples can be found in Galician and Polish songs: "beyond the rivers -- beyond the dunai." (Afanas'ev, "Poeticheskiya vozzreniya slavyan na prirodu /Poetic views of the Slavs on nature/," II, 220).

/3/ We see the same thing in Georgia, too, where, in the majority of instances, the names of the provinces and of the tribes inhabiting them were formed from concepts meaning "river, spring, lake, water," etc. Thus, for instance, dcha means "spring, well, river"; dcha-ri = river; a-dchari= Adchara (in Turkish Georgia, Adzharia; dchari (river) = Dchar oblast (in Zakataly); dcha-ni means 'wells, rivers" -- dchan-ethi = Dchanetia (the Grusian name for all Turkish Georgia); dcharokhi = the river Dchorokh; dcha-la, "grove, river" -- dchala-didi = Dchaladidi (literally "large river").

Phsha = rivulet, Phsha-ethi = Pshaviia; Phsha = river near Gori, river in Guria, in Adzharia, and in other places; Abasha (the ancient Aphsha) = river in Imeretia; Phasisi (the ancient Phsisi) = the river Phaz, Phas (literally, "river-"; phasisi is the genitive case).

From this same root comes a-phshi-li, exactly as a-dgi-li comes from dgi. Literally translated, a-phshi-li must mean "river." This I find the fullest resemblance between the

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101 174 names aphshili, phshaeli (Pshav), and Abasheli = Absheli (dweller on the banks of the river Abashi). The same meaning is also found in the word "Absari," in which, instead of the substantive verb ali, its other form ari appears (Abs-ari = Abs-ali); and since the Grusian ari, ali, and their abbreviated forms, ri, li, change to a and ua in Abkhaz (kharthu-ali = akhirthu-a = Grusian, guruli = a-gura-a = Gurian, me-gre-li = a-gru-a = Mingrel), we also have absua = Abkhaz, i.e., Grusian abshi-li (Abkhaz) = Abkhazian absu-a, with the same meaning.

From this same root are derived the names of many rivulets in Abkhazia, such as Phshitsa (a tributary of the Bzyb), Phshandra (near the village of Lykhny), the river Phstse, the river Khashu-Phse, the Phsbu, Tua-phse, etc.

/4/ The Circassians, of the same tribe as the Abkhaz and called adzikhi, adzigi, adzegi by the natives, got their name from the same root, dzi or dze, meaning "water, river, sea." As mentioned above, phse or phdze means "water, river" in Circassian; it has the same meaning in both Grusian and Abkhaz. Besides, in these latter languages from the same root were formed the words zghua or dzughva (Grusian, Mingrel and Svan) meaning "sea," adzizhi (Abkhaz) = lake, adzikhi (Abkhaz) = well, spring water. In this way, then the adzikhi (Circassians) came to be called by such a name. In exactly the same way, the word shapsugi from Grusian literally means "river-, living near the river" (sha-phsu-gi = sa-phsu-gi = sa-phshu-gi means in translation "where water -- there").

The most interesting of all is another word in Grusian, tba, meaning "lake." This word is found in the old literary monuments and today in the Mingrelian dialect and is pronounced the same way, toba; the Svan pronounce it tibar, sometimes tuibar, meaning "lake," as well as "deep ravine," and in general "deep hollow." In texts dated as early as the tenth century we find the name of the ancient Grusian province of Tbetha, in the center of which are the splendid ruins of the famous church of Tbetha, built by Ashot Kukh (died in 918). Tbetha means "lake region,

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101 194 lakes"; Tbeli and tobeli (1) mean "little lake, lake-, located

1. "Tbeli" (pronounced "tobeli" in Mingrel) has been the title of the bishops of Tbetha since 918 A.D.

or living near a lake." And I can find no difference whatsoever between the Grusian Tobeli and the biblical Thobeli, which on Kipert's map occupy exactly the spot where the Grusian province of Tobetha (Tobeli) is located.

Greco-Roman authors sometimes refer to these Thobeli as Tibareni, and this name is also the Grusian Tobeli or, in the Svan pronunciation, "Tibar." In the plural of this word we have "Tibareni," i.e., Tibarians = lake-dwellers. Hecataeus (ca. 550 B.C.) calls them Tipanisi (Tipanisse), which is a genitive plural and in Grusian means "those of the lakes." The Greco-Roman authors consider the Tipanisi, Tibareny, to be a people related to the Moskhi and the Kolkhi. From this same root we now have a multitude of /5/ names such as Tobarovani (rich in lakes), Lake Taparavan; Tobanieri (lake-), village in Imeretia (near Kutais); Toba-qure (lake-bay), village in Mingrelia; Didi-tba, great lake, near Tsarskie Kolodtsy; Tubanis-tba, lakish-lake, in the Akhalkalaki uyezd; Tqe-toba (forest-lake) in the Zakataly okrug, and others.

Reserving the right to return on some other occasion to a more detailed exposition of my views on the origin of the ethnic names of the Kartvelian people, I shall continue now with a brief historical sketch of Abkhazia.

195 The Grusian chronicles, the authenticity and ancientness of which were refuted by the late K.P. Patkanov, but which are fully substantiated anew by the discovered Grusian chronicle of the first half of the tenth century, testify that the propagator of Christianity in Abkhazia was Simon the Canaanite, who was in Georgia together with the apostle Andrew. Both apostles entered Adzharia, from where Andrew set out for Meskhetia (to Akhaltsikh),

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175 and Simon the Canaanite for Imeretia and Abkhazia. Although the latter fell victim here to heathens, the seeds of Christianity scattered by him did not die without a trace; they sprouted in the course of two to three centuries, and the heathen world shone forth with the light of Christian teaching. On the place where [178] Simon the Canaanite was killed, a temple was erected which attracts a multitude of pilgrims even now.

We also have information from the Greco-Roman authors concerning Christianity in Abkhazia and Georgia. For instance, Procopius, an author of the end of the sixth century, says: "Christianity has nowhere been preserved in such a pure form as in Iveria /Iberia/." Further: "Since the reign of Justinian Augustus, the customs of the Abkhaz have been noticeably mollified because of their adoption of Christianity. Justinian sent to them one of his eunuchs, Everrat, an Abkhaz by birth, with the object of stopping the princes from producing castrates. Justinian also built in the country of the Abkhaz a temple to the Mother of God and appointed priests and saw to it that the latter spread Christianity" (1).

1. Brosset, Histoire de la Géorgie, St. Petersburg, 1856, 4to, II, p. 240.

The temple of the Mother of God mentioned by Procopius is the famous temple of Bichvinta (Pitsunda), which from the earliest times has played a prominent role, not only in the religious life, but also in the political life of the Abkhaz. The Abkhazian eristav /governor of a province/ /6/ Leon II, taking advantage of Georgia's weakness after two Arab military invasions, made himself independent of the king of Georgia, Dzhuansher, and assumed the title of King of Abkhazia in 786. As the capital of his kingdom he selected Bichvinta, where the Catholicoi were already installed. The independence of the Abkhaz kingdom lasted two centuries in all. David the Great, King of Georgia, being childless, adopted Bagrat III (980-1014), born of the marriage of Gurgen, the heir to the Georgian throne, and Gurandukhta, the daughter of George II, King of Abkhazia.

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175 And since the male line of the Abkhaz kings was cut off with the death of the blind king Theodosius II, the Abkhaz kingdom, by right of the closest relation to that house, together with the appanages of the Bagratids of Samtskhe, was united with the Grusian kingdom, and Bagrat III assumed the title of the Grusian and the Abkhaz King. Since that time the Catholicoi of Mtskheta have assumed the title of the Catholicoi "of all Georgia" and sometimes "of all Georgia and Abkhazia." In the florescent period of Grusian history (tenth to twelfth centuries) all Abkhazia and especially its coastal parts were covered with towns, monasteries, churches, and fortified castles. From the end of the 177 fifteenth century on, i.e. upon the fall of Byzantium and the 175 replacement of the cross in the Hagia Sophia by the crescent, Mohammedanism gradually began to spread in Abkhazia; this trend was further favored by the circumstance that in that same century Georgia, weakened and ruined in the century-old struggle with the Mongols and later with the Persians and Turks, broke up in the fifteenth century into three kingdoms (Kakhetia, Kartlia, and Imeretia) and five principalities (Samtskhe, Svanetia, Mingrelia, Abkhazia, and Guria); moreover, the Turks subjugated Adzharia and began to spread Mohammedanism there. At this time also the Caucasian mountaineers (Lezgi /Lezgin/, Chechen, North Osset, Circassians, and others) renounced Christianity and accepted Mohammedanism. Georgia, surrounded on all sides by Mohammedanism, managed with difficulty to preserve her religion, but weak and small Abkhazia was unable to do so; Mohammedan doctrine spread widely there and would have completely swallowed up Christianity if the Georgians had not in good time called the Colossus of the North to the defense of all the ancient aborigines of the Caucasus.

127 In the compilation of the present ethnographical sketch of Abkhazia, the author has used as source-material and texts the following articles by Abkhazians: 1. "Abkhaziya i Abkhaztsy /Abkhazia and the Abkhaz/," an ethnographical sketch by P. Giorgidze, published in Iveriia, 1888; 2. "Abkhaziya," /7/ an ethnographical sketch by K. Madchavariani, in the newspaper

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127 Droeba, 1884-1885; 3. "Ocherk Abkhazskoy mifologii /Sketch of Abkhaz Mythology/," by verovaniya abkhaztsev /Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz/," by A., in the Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh, No. V; and 5. "Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie tuzemnago naseleniya Sukhumskago otdiela /The Economic Condition of the Native Population of the Sukhum District/," same author, in the same Sbornik, VI.

M. Dzhanashvili. April 25, 1892, Tiflis.

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## I.

## Abkhazia and the Abkhaz

The Abkhaz -- His Character -- Robberies, Raids, and Thieving -- Eloquence of the Abkhaz -- Blood Vengeance -- Love of Homeland -- Hospitality, Politeness, and Friendliness -- Honesty -- Values -- Folk Games -- Poetry.

142 The Abkhaz is a mountaineer of medium stature, slender,
181 swarthy, with black hair and eyes. He is fearless, brave, and proud, but at the same time capricious and extremely quick-tempered. Besides his inborn giftedness, his beauty, and, in general, the likeable aspects of his character, he also exhibits quite a few negative traits, of which we shall speak below.

579 Since the most ancient times the Abkhaz have been known as the most fearless and daring of robbers. They constantly raided their neighbors, pillaging and ruining them. For that matter, the habit of robbing and raiding is common to all the mountaineers in general. "Without robbery and raids, life is not worth living to a mountaineer," says Sergei Mech in his work. All his poetry, all the beauty of his existence is in this trait of the mountaineer. Only the tiger can be compared to the mountaineer in the suddenness and swiftness of his attack on a sleeping village in the deep, dark night. Going for plunder, the mountaineer is sure that

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579 nothing will give him away or betray him, neither his dagger, always kept in a sheath, nor the glitter of his rifle, wrapped in a cover, nor the soft, inaudible steps of his feet outfitted in bast shoes, nor his horse, well-trained for night-riding, nor, finally, his tongue, the hissing sounds of which resemble the rustling of leaves... With bloodshot eyes, his dagger in one hand and his pistol in the other, the mountaineer throws himself into the battle with a frightful whoop, and at this moment he forgets everything but victory... Such are the Abkhaz and their neighbors.

Even now the Abkhaz looks upon thieving as an act of boldness, of heroism, /9/ and almost as much of a necessity as food and drink. All the Abkhaz, from the small to the great, suffer equally from this ailment -- men, women, and children, and the Abkhazian upper class have even made it their regular occupation. Times and circumstances change, generation after [198] generation slowly but steadily introduces new cultural principles into Abkhaz life -- and robbery alone remains the favorite occupation, as though hallowed by the authority of a hoary antiquity...

867 As a matter of fact, what is surprising about it? While still a child, the Abkhaz is subjected to the irresistible influence of the circumstances surrounding him and of all possible elemental forces. And as he grows up, he acts according to these external elemental influences or internal moral influences. Now, to what forces is the Abkhaz exposed in his youth, and what moral principles does he derive from the phenomena and facts of nature and the milieu around him?... There he is, as a child, holding in his hand a knife with a handle bigger than he is, pasturing buffalo or goats in the forest or in the mountains, and he observes what goes on before his eyes: here a fox, lying in wait for a careless wild chicken, catches its prey and carries it into the depths of the forest to finish it off; there a half-starved wolf snatches a lamb from the herd, under the eyes of the unwary shepherd -- a boy like himself; and there, farther away, a bird of prey, waiting until the right moment, shoots down like an arrow upon one of the weaker forest-dwellers and, sinking its claws into its body, flies up with its prey and disappears into

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867 the blue skies... and so it is, day after day. These very same examples of unpunished robbery and violence, repeated daily, must leave deep traces in the conscience of the observant young shepherd. Upon his return home, phenomena he has observed in nature are consolidated and, as it were, sanctified in his eyes by the authority of the older members of the family: every day there are discussions and squabbles about the loss or stealing of cattle; on the one hand, he hears words of praise and approval applied to stealing, and, on the other hand, curses addressed to the thief; finally he sees how the housewife, the lawfulness of whose behavior he has never once thought of doubting, very cautiously digs up the buried meat of an animal stolen from the neighbors and cooks it... And when the child, grown wise by
867 observing his mileu and by the successful experiences of his
579 relatives, /10/ matures into a grown youth, his parents and the leading members of the family in general provide him with arms, having given him their blessing beforehand with the words: "Now make your own living, make your fortune by thievery and robbery, the same as all the people your age." Hence, thievery here has not only the status of an example worthy to be followed when the proper occasion presents itself; it is presented as an obligatory modus vivendi, as a dogma, sanctioned by the authority of the parents and of the older members of the family in general.

867 Let us turn our attention to still another circumstance. As
579 is well known, children love fairy tales and all kinds of stories
538 and legends. In the long winter nights, the old men and women tell stories to the Abkhaz children. But the majority of such tales are likewise harmful from the point of view of moral influence, for the contents of these legends, fairy tales, and stories go no further than eulogies of stealing, robbery, and raiding; in them are sung the praises of the daring, determination, and bravery of some "abrag" (abrek = bandit), of his resourcefulness as a thief, his keen-wittedness when in difficulties, his audacity in robbing and seizing another man's property. This may provide a partial explanation of the regrettable phenomenon in the life of the Abkhaz, that even persons who have had a modicum of secondary education

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867 immediately upon their return home revert to the practice ac-
579 quired in childhood -- stealing. This is of course not the fault of the school or of secondary education, but of the traditional views on this "trade," contact with which kills every other way of looking at it, as the lone wheat-stalk is smothered among the weeds that surround it.

579 In his stealing, the Abkhaz is treacherous. The best of friends, to all appearances, do not hesitate to steal from each other, and in Abkhazia it is no rare thing for brother to steal from brother, father from son, or son from father. It is almost proverbial that when an Abkhaz has no one to steal from, he robs himself. There have been instances of an Abkhaz stealing a horse from a neighbor on a dark night, taking it miles and miles away and exchanging it for another, riding back home on this fresh horse the same night, and the next morning, the minute his neighbor raised the alarm, rushing over and being the first to offer his sympathy and joining the chorus of people calling down curses on the thief and dashing off with the others in frenzied pursuit.

685 The Abkhaz thief will not admit his crime, even /11/ when
579 he could be convicted on the evidence of witnesses. When a
692 robbery case is tried at village meetings, a decision of the judge in favor of the accused is not infrequently influenced by the audacity of the latter's pretexts, by his shameless subterfuges, and by his so-called "talking circles around them." In general at such
[537] meetings, any exhibition of sly rhetoric, however shameless, on the part of a notorious thief finds not only attentive listeners but even admirers. "He saved himself by the bravery of his speech," they say in such cases.

And though such "eloquence" on the part of the thief often saves the guilty one from punishment, the victim, understandably, does not believe in his innocence and tries to get back at him at the proper moment for his losses, according to the formula of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

682 At present vengeance for spilled blood is on the wane, but at one time it was one of the most important features of Abkhaz life. The custom of blood-revenge puts the relatives of a person

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682 killed under the obligation of killing either the murderer or one of the latter's relatives. A blood-feud passes from generation to generation and is a person's sacred duty; unavenged blood is considered a shame and a disgrace for the living relatives of the person killed. The Abkhaz believe that if for some reason or other blood remains unavenged, it will avenge itself.

In case the killer himself managed to escape, a relative
[628] of his was held responsible; he was killed, captured, or robbed and finally ruined. Even the killing of the meanest slave often led to clashes involving whole villages; if a mutual understanding and peace were not restored among them, the result of such a feud would be that one of the villages had to face ruin or move away to another place.

682 In blood-feuds the descent of the persons involved played
565 an important role. If, for instance, a prince killed a peasant, the relatives of the latter had no right to avenge the blood of the killed upon the killer, for "the blood of a peasant is not equal to that of a prince." Therefore, instead of the prince himself,
[608] it was his foster father who had to pay for the blood shed by the prince.

There were different settlements for the blood of a peasant, a nobleman, or a prince.

Although the personal qualities of a man commanded /12/ special attention in Abkhazia the blood of a peasant was nevertheless valued lower than the blood of a nobleman, and that of the latter lower than the blood of a prince. For instance, if the blood of a peasant was valued at five human souls, then the blood of a nobleman was worth three times more, and that of a prince five times more than the blood of a peasant. The price
[435] of a life was determined in terms of spans /pyad'/. A soul (person) four spans tall was valued at 30 cows or 30 rubles in silver; one of five spans, 50 cows or 50 silver rubles; and one of six spans, 70 cows or 70 rubles in silver. Arms and clothing were added as supplementary payment. Blood was paid off with cows, goats, sheep, and beehives. The number of the latter was determined on the basis of the value of a cow.

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682 If the blood-price was not paid within a certain period, then
426 at the end of the year, in place of a debt of four spans, five were owed, in place of five, six, and six became seven, so that an already considerable debt increased still more and weighed like a heavy burden on the shoulders of the debtor. But the Abkhaz had one excellent custom -- that of coming to the aid of an insolvent debtor. All the latter had to do was to announce that he "owed for blood," and everybody contributed his mite to pay off the debt.

796 The following ceremony was considered the best way to a
687 complete reconciliation of the parties involved in a blood-feud.
608 A relative of the killer gave a banquet and, through intermediaries, invited the claimant of blood himself or his son. It was sufficient to persuade the claimant of blood to touch his lips to the breast of the wife or mother of the debtor, and, as a result of this action alone, everlasting and indissoluble peace would be restored between them. If, on the other hand, the blood-avenger would not be appeased and would not come to the feast, then those acting for the other side endeavored to abduct the son or some other close relative of the claimant or in some other way get such a person into their house. If they succeeded, then peace was restored whether the avenger liked it or not, for to kill the foster father was considered a violation and desecration of the "breast" and
186 beneath the dignity of a brave man. Love of homeland is developed to the highest degree in the Abkhaz. Some peoples say, ubi bene, ibi patria, but the Abkhaz, on the other hand, prays: "There is no better place in the world than Abkhazia. God, save Abkhazia." In both grief and happiness alike, the Abkhaz repeats this prayer.

574 As is the case with all ancient peoples, hospitality is piously honored and maintained in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz is convinced that every guest is accompanied by seven "baraka" (blessing, /13/ bliss, abundance), one of which remains with the host, and God gives back to the guest this seventh baraka. Even the poorest Abkhaz does his utmost to treat his guest as well as possible; when an Abkhaz sees a traveler going along the village

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574 road in the evening, he immediately greets him, "bziala vahbeit" -- "it is good to see you!" Then he invites the traveler into his house; "Come in and rest, where are you going now? Spend the night in our house, and early in the morning go your way." If the traveler, be he an acquaintance or a stranger, accepts the invitation and puts up at the host's house, he receives a warm reception and is wonderfully well regaled. And if the traveler does not accept the invitation, he replies, "ubeikht" (grow rich, thank you) and continues on his way. The custom of hospitality protects the traveler even from blood-vengeance. Once he is someone's guest, no one has the right to touch him.

181 888 Along with his hospitality and generosity, the Abkhaz is also courteous, polite, and respectful, especially to older persons. Here are a few examples.

515 516 [264] Before taking any food the Abkhaz usually wash their hands. But the washing is performed in order of seniority, the ablution of the hands beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest of those attending the banquet. The same order is observed in drinking wine. But on such occasions the oldest person does not lag behind either. In the beginning he renounces his right of priority and invites the person next in rank to drink wine or to wash his hands first. This is required by the custom of courtesy and politeness. But, of course, the younger person flatly refuses the honor offered him. Finally, after many mutual compliments and words of persuasion, the first one (the oldest) accepts the invitation after all. Then the same ceremony is gone through between the second and the third, the third and the fourth, and so on, down to the youngest person attending. Furthermore, while the oldest persons are washing their hands, the younger ones are obliged to remain standing. Here again there is ceremony, exhortations for them to sit down, but if those who are urged to do so ignore these exhortations and continue to stand, then the older person considers it improper to

576 wash his hands sitting down, and he also stands up. The question of which of two persons shall first cross the threshold and

/13 cont./

5176 enter a house is decided with the same ceremoniousness. Or, for example, when two horsemen meet each other in the forest. If the younger of the two has something to say to the older one, he must dismount and speak while standing on the ground. At that point, the older one urges him to speak without dismounting.

/14/ The language of the Abkhaz also bears witness to their politeness. In conversation they often use such expressions as: "I ask that your sickness will pass on to me," "may I become the victim of your sicknesses," "may I be the victim instead of you," "may I go around the place where you are lying," etc. In keeping with this last expression, an Abkhaz woman, when visiting her sick foster-child or a person she has not seen for a [608] [755] long time, walks three times around him with the words, "utsge mtsuge seizgat," i.e. "may I carry away your sickness, your misfortune."

For every occasion in life, the Abkhaz has a special greeting, in which are expressed his wishes for prosperity, strength, victory, fertility, profit, etc. In this repertoire of various Abkhaz greetings, there are even some which are especially meant for occasions when one meets persons who are going to a horse-race, greetings for the person who is arranging 181 the races, and so forth. And this is quite understandable and natural for a people such as the Abkhaz, for whom horse and arms constitute the most beloved things, which they have been accustomed to value highly almost from the cradle. The children [565] of members of the upper classes in the very first years of their lives become excellent riders and weapon-bearers. Pistol, [411] dagger, saber, knife, and a whole arsenal of weapons are the [293] constant adornment of every Abkhaz man. For him there is no greater pleasure than to ride armed from head to foot, a burka thrown over him, in the company of his comrades, singing a merry song. Without a horse and arms, life is not worth living to an Abkhaz!

526 Besides horse-races and trick-riding, the following games [541] are worth noting in the life of the Abkhaz: 1. the ball-game, 538 2. arkil-riki, and 3. stone-throwing. The folk-music and folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager.

/14 cont./

folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager. Their only musical instrument is the achangur, a balalaika, and even this has been borrowed (to judge from the name) from the Grusians (Grusian: chonguri). Abkhaz versification for the most part is governed by alliteration. Examples:

Varvultu --- barfuntu

Chilar marda qulardam

Arba arba sinarba

Masta mastarou

Masta stakhou

Siamul utsa

Siamul siakhou

Siandzhar utsa.

/15/

II.

Home-life of the Abkhaz -- Family -- Position of Women.

The whole domestic life of the Abkhaz is arranged so unpretentiously that all the necessary household articles, with the exception of iron things, are produced by the Abkhaz himself from materials which are at hand. The smith's trade, which requires a certain special technical knowledge, is left in the hands of special craftsmen. In every village there are two or three blacksmiths who will produce anything the Abkhaz needs from a piece of iron which he gives them. The smiths are highly regarded by the community and their craft itself has sacred significance in the eyes of the Abkhaz.

Trading is considered a shameful occupation, and the Abkhaz therefore do not engage in it, but if it were developed, the Abkhaz could sell many things at a profit. For instance, the Abkhaz women, who, by the way, are great masters of all kinds of home crafts, produce from sheep and goat skins the

/15 cont./

462 morocco-leather (tsush) so popular with foreigners; this tsush
[281] serves in Abkhazia for bedding in summer. The men make
[513] beautiful spoons out of wood and animal horns. Many hunters
[912] kill seven or eight bears a year, but do not sell the skins. In
437 general buying and selling in Abkhazia are done by barter;
money is not used in these cases.

433 The main sources of food of the Abkhaz are agriculture,
[931] cattle-breeding, and to a certain extent, apiculture. In the
[541] foothills the Abkhaz often possess as many as 200 and more
beehives. Nowadays they sow maize and occasionally wheat.
A few years ago, gomi (ghomi) /millet/ was considered the main
and most widespread cereal, but now maize has completely
supplanted it. Besides this, tobacco, cotton, flax, hemp, and
vegetables are sown, but in limited quantity and only for home use.

233 Cattle constitute the main wealth of the Abkhaz; in
[556] their opinion this is the main support of the life of man; it is
what feeds him, makes him grow, and preserves him. The
Abkhaz cannot conceive of life without cattle; one can somehow
manage to get along without bread, but not without cattle.
This conception is especially true of the herdsmen, of whom it
[262] may be said /16/ that they live almost exclusively on meat and
milk. To feed his herd, not infrequently consisting of no more
than two or three head of cattle, the Abkhaz, when grass gave
out in one place, would move to another place where grass was
easier to find, taking along his phatskha (hut of wattles). So it
[178] was until the last war; after that the main attention of the
[243] Abkhaz was concentrated on the sowing of maize, the export
of which is growing day by day.

342 The structure of the Abkhaz house, the phatskha, is simple.
In appearance it is round or rectangular. The walls of the
phatskha slope upwards and are woven together with thin nut-
twigs; on top of these rests a cone-shaped roof; the top of the
cone is tied together with willow-branches or twigs; the branches
are supported by little poles (dardzagini /see foreign text/). This
[824] simple structure is covered with ferns, reeds, or spear-grass
(Agrostis vulgaris).

/16 cont./

342 Another kind of phatskha, in the form of an irregular rectangular, is constructed as follows. Two chestnut poles are driven into the ground at the front door in such a way that the upper ends touch each other. The Abkhaz call them amakratl-khkva (scissors). On the side opposite the "scissors" another pole is driven in; a beam is laid on top of the "scissors" and this pole, and the roof rests on it. The roof of such a phatskha can be flat or sloping. Such a phatskha can be built in any size. A passage is made in front of it, and in the back there is a special com-
[233] partment for storing all kinds of utensils and for keeping the cattle in winter. The walls of the phatskha are not covered; only in winter are they now and then covered with ferns. Therefore the walls are easily penetrated by light, and at the same time by cold and rain.

354 Inside the house, in the middle of the phatskha, is the
[252] hearth (akhushtaara), made of clay or hewn stone. Above the
[415] hearth cast-iron kettles are suspended from the ceiling on hoops; in these the food is cooked. The Abkhaz try to maintain a permanent fire in the hearth. The smoke escapes through the roof, but on windy days it remains circling inside the room; therefore the phatskha, and especially the upper part of it, is
352 covered with soot. On one side of the phatskha there is a couch; near the hearth stands a long and fairly wide bench, which sometimes also serves as a couch. The bedding is arranged on the couch; nearby stands a trunk, where all the necessary articles are kept. On the wall hang a saddle, a whip, and some
415 of the /17/ weapons. In a corner, close to the wall, are the utensils for preparing ghomi; in this same corner are baskets for provisions, wooden or horn spoons and cups hang on the wall, while milk-pails and troughs, etc. stand on the floor. Basins and pitchers are rarely found; instead of a pitcher, a gourd
412 is used. A few implements must be added to all this: a flat stone used as a mortar, and a whetstone. And that is the whole domestic inventory of the Abkhaz of average means.

342 The large quadrangular phatskha serves as the main family
585 dwelling, while the conical one (khkvatsu) serves as a lodging for

/17 cont./

342 [585] newly-married couples. The poor sometimes have only one small house.

262 The ordinary daily food of the Abkhaz consists of cheese, corn bread, ghomi, and sour milk. The ghomi is prepared with cheese (aelagzh), or with milk and cheese (achamukhkua). In winter the Abkhaz contents himself with cooked meat; goat's meat is preferred. Doing without wine is no problem to him as long as there is sour milk. The Abkhaz hates crawfish; formerly he also disliked fish, but is now gradually becoming accustomed to eating it; there are also certain vegetables that are not eaten, [263] but the Abhaz likes food that is spiced with bitter herbs and pepper, etc. For occasions of prayer cone-shaped loaves of bread are baked, which are later boiled, in water during Lent and at other times in milk. These loaves are called arvazha.

592 The rights of seniority are strictly observed in the Abkhaz family. All the members of the household obey their pater familias (avn aihab). In the family everything is done according to his orders and wishes; only in matters concerning women does the oldest woman in the family (avn eihab aphs) take command. The younger members always act according to the instructions of the older ones, but if a younger member of the family is cleverer or more experienced than one of superior age, then for all practical purposes things are arranged according to his wishes and instructions.

The oldest (man and woman) in the home perform all re- [888] ligious rites and prayers. The oldest man also performs all [593] family rites. Sons take care of their aged parents with great love; they usually do not leave the parental home as long as the parents are alive. If a separation takes place; the parents are 428 given half of the entire property. In case the property is divided [592] between a mother and her sons, the mother gets, in addition to her dowry, a share equal to that of each of her sons; she then /18/ settles with one of her sons, as she sees fit. The oldest brother is alloted a special share for his seniority (aihabshakhu). If there are many cattle, this special share will consist of one head of each kind of cattle; if there is not much, then only one, the best, is given. The youngest brother also gets a special share

/18 cont./

428 (eits'bshakhu /see foreign text/). After the settlement for seniority and minority, all that is left is divided equally among the brothers; in addition, the youngest receives the father's house, yard, etc. Sisters receive less than brothers.

593 Kind and affable in public, the Abkhaz at home is rather stern, imperious, and so taciturn that it is as if he were too lazy, or at any rate not sufficiently inclined, to spare a single kind or friendly word for the members of his household. The Abkhaz

562 woman enjoys a great deal of freedom. She is no less busy than
462 the man; for instance, she carries the maize to the mill herself, and in some places she grinds it herself with a hand mill. In summer, she works, hoe in hand, side by side with the man in the maize-field. The wives of the members of the higher classes
[565] toil no less than their husbands, but, on the other hand, they enjoy more freedom and are held more in esteem than is the case otherwise.

562 A woman is treated with respect and esteem by young and old. Women attend community meetings, mourning rites,
[535] funeral banquets; they are present at the gatherings of the men and dance with them. There have been instances of women
[579] being the leaders of the abragi in night raids. Women perform religious rites and ceremonies. But with all this, the Abkhaz woman is expected to be innocent and modest, and to speak to older men politely and courteously.

562 If her husband divorces her without sufficient reason, the
586 Abkhaz woman has the right to appear at the village meeting and
[692] defend herself. And she skillfully uses this right: she goes to the meeting with as much determination as her husband, and defends herself with great eloquence. While the husband can divorce his wife on various grounds, she can do the same to her husband if he has done her any wrong.

/18 cont./

III.

Education -- The Educated -- The Educators

565 While the upper class in Abkhazia enjoyed privilege and
566 power, the situation of the lower classes was one of great oppression; /19/ the batoni (master, feudal lord) looked upon his
[567] subject, his slave, as a commodity; he could sell or pawn him according to circumstances. However, even after the abolition
[579] of slavery, the position of the peasantry did not improve, due to the fact that the nobility did not cease from robbery and pillage and plunder until the most recent times.

565 Under such a state of affairs, all the peasantry could do
608 was to resign itself to feudal conditions and try, wherever possible, to get protection. The best method lay in the custom of adoption, or the rearing of the sons of the aristocrats by the peasants. Thanks to this custom, the aristocrats themselves were strengthened, for in this way they gained in the peasants their most faithful supporters, while at the same time freeing their wives from the onerous duty of bringing up and feeding their own children. This is the reason that in all Abkhazia there is not a single peasant who has not reared one or several princes and nobles; as a consequence of this custom, hardly one per cent of the nobles have been nursed at their own mother's breast.

Before the beginning of childbirth in a family of the aristocracy (didebuli), on the one hand relatives and acquaintances and, on the other hand, the future foster-mothers of the expected child, accompanied by their husbands and female relatives in order to be able to bear the newborn foster-child back to their village with due ceremony, begin to gather around the pregnant
844 woman. During the childbirth, girls from the village also come to
565 visit the expectant mother in order to distract her and to relieve
[533] her sufferings during labor with gay songs and the telling of fables
[538] and fairy tales. The husband is absent during this time. According to the customs of the country, he is not allowed to be present when his wife gives birth and therefore leaves the home. Above

/19 cont./

844 565 the bed of the expectant mother a cord is suspended from the ceiling, which she can grasp during the severe pains and spasms of childbirth. It is indecent for her to let her moans and screams reach the ears of her parents-in-law; she must staunchly bear her sufferings so as not to lose their respect forever. At last the child is delivered. The birth of a boy brings more joy to the [842] mother than the birth of a girl, as it gives her more respect and honor in the eyes of society, but she is not particularly saddened by the birth of a daughter either, for it still serves as proof of her fertility. The newborn child is left in the care of the wet nurse [608 853] (the wife of the foster father), and the female relatives congratulate the new mother on the happy /20/ outcome of the delivery. The mother, too, is happy, and most of all, of course, because with the passing of the baby into the care of others she herself will soon recover and, free from caring for it, can more easily preserve her beauty and freshness of face. In a few days her husband returns and in his turn congratulates her on the delivery of her child (1).

1. Cf. the excellent article, "Abkhazia," by K. Machavariani in the newspaper Iveriia, 1884, No. 275.

608 565 On the day set for the departure of the wet nurse with the newborn baby, the parents give a banquet and give her the materials for a dress, for underwear, and for all the appurtenances for the child's cradle, a copper kettle to bathe it in, and other small articles.

From this day on the foster mother receives the honorary title of anadzdzei (nurse, foster mother), and both she and her husband, the abadzdzei (foster father), are held in universal respect; upon its entry into the house of the foster father and mother, the baby is recognized as a ward (akhupha) of the family to which the foster father belongs.

The foster parents cherish the child in due fashion and maintain him in comfort and contentment. After two or three [931] years the child is taken to its parents, along with presents consisting of one or two bulls, a goat, capons, wine, bread, etc.

/20 cont./

565 608 In the house of the child's parents, another banquet is held, to which the neighbors are also invited. On this occasion all kinds of honors are shown to the foster mother and her husband. The foster parents are granted the right to be the first to wash their hands, and upon their return home the parents of the child must seat them on their horses, i.e., when they mount, the stirrups on the other side must be held. The foster parents return home with [431] the child, loaded with all kinds of presents, animals, clothes, money.

The foster child remains with the foster parents during the course of eight or nine years, and then it is taken to the real parents. It hardly need be said that the child, having spent its early years in someone else's home, where it grew up and learned to walk, talk, and to love its foster mother and those surroundings, now has difficulty in adjusting itself to the new situation -- at [154] first the father's house seems almost like a prison to him. For this reason the child is allowed to visit the foster parents frequently. If the foster child is an orphan, however, he remains in the home and under the care of his foster parents until he is married.

/21/ The foster child is obligated to defend the interests of the foster parents, i.e. of that family whose members reared him. He is required, for instance, to search for a lost article belonging to his foster parents, to find the thief and to call him to account, and it is a great disgrace to him if he is unable to do this. In the same way, if someone offends the foster parents and they are not strong enough to pay back the insult, their ward must stand up for them. Let us suppose, for instance, that some prince has beaten a peasant. In this case the ward of the injured peasant must de- [683] mand satisfaction, not from the princely offender himself, for "his blood is unequal to that of a peasant," but from his foster parent, a peasant, and he is the one who has to answer for the insult inflicted upon the foster parent of another prince. If a peasant foster-father gets into any kind of trouble, his princely ward endeavors by hook or by crook to rescue him from his difficulties. In such cases, if the ward himself is still immature and unable to help his foster parents, then his parents act in his place.

/21 cont./

565 608 This, however, does not exhaust the role of the ward with regard to his foster parent. He is the main character in the joys and sorrows of his foster parent; in all the occasions of his life that have any importance. Thus, when his foster mother, or her [765] husband, or one of their children dies, he bewails them bitterly, dresses in mourning, lets his hair grow, buys the coffin at his own [764] expense, and takes care of the arrangements and the ceremonial for the mourning and the funeral of the deceased. When the funeral banquet is given, he provides a sheep or a horse and again arranges everything. The ward also is the main character [583] when the son of his foster mother abducts a girl to be his wife; if the relatives of the girl pursue the abductor, the princely ward comes to his aid with words and weapons and does not give up the abducted girl; subsequently he keeps her at his house until the matter is definitely settled, for none of the relatives of the abducted girl would dare to attack his home.

If, on the other hand, the marriage of the son or daughter [584] of the foster father is arranged peacefully by the voluntary consent of both sides, then here, too, the princely ward is considered the bridegroom's best man and presents the bride with money, a horse, etc.

The foster parents in turn do not fail to perform their duties with regard to their ward, whom they call their sun, their /22/ sacredness, and by whose name they swear. Every year at [431] Christmastide they give him presents, such as cheese, capons, and bread; at Easter, a lamb or a kid and "chumukhkvati." These presents are the obligatory outward signs of sincere liking and friendship on the part of lesser ones ("lower brotherhood") towards those of higher rank; with their cessation the mutual friendship is also broken off.

The sons of the foster mother are usually the bosom friends [509] and accomplices of the ward in his nocturnal thieving adventures. That is why a prince or nobleman always takes the sons of his foster mother with him on his thieving expeditions; he knows that

/22 cont./

565 608 [579] [764] [765] they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for him if necessary. When a ward dies, the grief and sorrow of the foster parents are unbounded; for his funeral they furnish a shroud and money; they also bring one or two bulls, sheep, etc. for the funeral repast for the deceased. When their ward marries, they give him all kinds of assistance through their personal labor. They [585] also present him with fattened animals and bring presents to his bride as well.

608 565 796 Among the Abkhaz another type of wardship also exists, namely, that of an adult man being invited to assume the role of ward. The Abkhaz peasant invites such a man with the words, "I wish to take you into my house and honor you according to my means." On the appointed day, the person invited goes to the house of his future foster father and takes along a few additional people. During the supper the host and his relatives kneel down in front of their ward-to-be and give him a glass of wine; they then stand and one of them addresses to him the following speech: "From this day on we regard you as having been nursed in our family; we are of the same spirit as you and will begrudge you nothing; we hope that you, too, will begrudge us nothing; you will be held in higher esteem than the other wards." After this they present him with a few rubles and give something to his companions (khadzh /see foreign text/). While handing over the presents, they say, "Vadcha enup" (a present for you). This ceremony ends in the following way: on a carpet, spread on the floor, a chest is placed, on which the wife of the host of the house, i.e., the future foster mother, seats herself; the other women surround her. Then the ward-to-be enters through the open door, stands in front of the hostess seated on the chest, greets her, /23/ and thrice touches with his lips the nipple of her breast, or, as the Abkhaz say, "bites her nipples three times"; after each time he repeats, "from this day on you are my own mother." And indeed, from 608 565 this time on exactly the same mutual relations obtain between them as in the first case where another's child is fully reared. It need hardly be said that, besides the princes and nobles, the

/23 cont./

608 565 peasants also rear the children of clergymen, of merchants, and even of other peasants. There are also cases of even nobles taking in and rearing the sons of strong and influential princes on the same basis.

## IV.

## Marriage

583 Some fifteen years ago the groom usually abducted a girl for a wife; that is to say, without the consent of the girl's parents or her own consent, he carried out an attack upon her with the help of his comrades and led her away by force. Such cases are rare nowadays. On the contrary, abductions are now for the greater part carried out with the consent of the bride herself, though not infrequently against the will of her parents. In the latter case, the one chosen as a bride comes at night to a previously arranged place a few versts from the parental home. The groom comes to the same place with his comrades, on horses. She mounts a horse brought especially for her, and the whole cavalcade gallops back to the home of the groom or to that of some influential person. No pursuers are able to take the bride away from the abductors, for they are prepared, if necessary, to fight to the last drop of blood for her. Soon after the abduction the girl herself announces publicly that the abduction took place according to her personal wishes and that she can be happy only with her abductor. Mutual negotiations are now [584] initiated and everything ends in peace; the son-in-law brings presents to the mother and the father of the bride, and the case is closed.

584 583 [558] It must be noted that the Abkhaz never abducts a girl lower in standing than himself. This would be considered a loss of honor for the abductor. On the contrary, everybody tries to abduct a girl of higher or at least equal birth. To propose to a [154] girl and to receive a refusal either from her or from her parents

/23 cont./

584 [583] [54] is considered a mortal insult; /24/ in this case abduction is considered the only way of satisfying one's injured self-esteem. But usually marriage negotiations are conducted in Abkhazia by female matchmakers or by intermediaries. If they bring the matter to a happy conclusion, their labors are rewarded with the [465] heads and hides of the oxen that are butchered for the wedding. As soon as a mutual understanding has been reached, the bride and groom, after an exchange of presents, set a day for a meeting.

At the designated time, the groom and his friends set out, with presents, for the house of the parents of the bride. A [583] princely groom sometimes brings as many as 20 or 30 horses, of which many are saddled. Now a feast is held at the groom's [574] expense. During the banquet the friends of the groom, on the one hand, and those invited by the bride's parents, on the other, try in all possible ways to outdo each other in witticisms, puns, eloquence, in the amount of wine consumed, in singing, etc. The next day the comrades of the groom receive various presents and the groom himself receives a horse, or money and arms. Then the comrades return home, while the son-in-law remains in the house of the bride's parents with his delegate (dade).

But the future son-in-law still feels extremely ill at ease. According to the custom of the country, he may not yet show himself to the parents of the bride or their relatives. He is wrapped in a burka, and his head and face are wrapped in a bashlyk, under which only his eyes are barely visible. On the first night, during the feast, he hides himself somewhere outside and spends the night in a neighboring house. On the next day he is forcibly taken to the bride's house. But even now he does not dare to sit down and remains standing by the door, leaving it to his delegate to speak for him. In general it is not [606] proper for the young son-in-law to eat with his parents-in-law, or sometimes even to sit down with them at the table. In some places, husband and wife never appear together before the wife's parents. This is considered shameful.

The bride takes up residence in a small house (amhara),

/24 cont./

584 from which she does not emerge until a feast is held in the big house. Then she is led into the house, and one of the elderly friends of the family, or the father himself, puts a piece of liver on a spit and begins to pray and to express wishes that the couple before him may be happy, prolific, etc.

When the groom returns from the house of his bride's parents to that of his father, he again is not allowed to show himself to his parents and older relatives. This, too, would be considered /25/ indecent. He does not appear until after the feast has been given by his father. Now the same blessings and wishes that were given when the bride was led out of her amhara are repeated, and the groom gives presents to his mother, father, uncle, foster father, and in general to all older relatives. This feast bears the name aphkhasharkhe (portion of shame, remover of shame).

585 After the preparation of the dowry, the bride's parents
[583] invite their future son-in-law in order to entrust their daughter to him; at the appointed time the groom comes to get her with his friends and her girl-friends. On the way home with the bride,
[533] the marriage song bedniera (happiness) is sung, there is trick-
[526] riding on horses, pistol-shooting, etc. When they are approaching the house of the groom, they send someone ahead to announce the arrival of the bride to the groom's father and mother. Such a messenger stops somewhere near the gates of the house and
[202] without a word fires a pistol in the air. In the house he is offered some honey or sugar.

Meanwhile the wedding procession reaches the house. Here the friends and girl-friends amuse themselves for a while with a huge round loaf of wheaten bread, throwing it three times over the bride and over the house and breaking it into pieces, which are picked up by those present. After this the bride is led into the house, at the entrance of which two men hold swords crossed overhead. At the threshold she is offered honey or sugar, with the words, "May God give you a tongue as sweet." After the bride enters the house she is handed a cup filled with grains of gomi, on top of which an egg has been placed. Then she is led three times around the hearth while she scatters the grains of gomi. The bride is then seated, and they hand her a little boy

/25 cont./

585 as a sort of prediction that she, too, will give birth to a boy. A little later the bride is brought to the separate small house (amhara), and then the real wedding-feast begins.

On the second and third days the relatives come, meet the bride, and bring her presents, each according to his means. When they want to get acquainted with the bride, a friend of hers, her delegate (dade), lifts from her face the veil with which she is covered; the visitors greet the bride, and she, without saying a word, stands erect and quietly, with her eyes lowered. The responses are not made by her, but by her friend. When sufficient time has elapsed after the wedding, /26/ she answers questions addressed to her, but, instead of saying "yes" or "no," she only shakes her head.

The young bride remains in the amhara for some months; [597] then she is invited into the main house, and from this time on the whole care of the household is put on her shoulders. She always tries to satisfy her parents-in-law and to act according to their wishes. For several months she does not speak to anyone; afterwards she begins to speak, first to the younger people in the house and in the village, and later on also to the older ones, and last of all to her parents-in-law. The young bride is referred to by all the villagers as "our daughter-in-law"; they bring her various kinds of sewing-work, which she does without reward.

602 For many years the young couple avoids being seen together by the husband's parents, and they cannot eat together [606] in their presence as long as they live. In conversation with older [264] people, whether relatives or strangers, the wife cannot refer to her husband as "my husband," nor the husband to his wife as "my wife." The daughter-in-law may not sit down on the bench on [606] which her father-in-law or mother-in-law have been seated. [551] The wife can never call her husband by name and in cases of necessity manages instead with the pronouns "you" and "he." In the same way, she does not call by name her brother-in-law, her husband's foster parents, members of the family, the village elders, etc. The husband, on the other hand, only

avoids

/26 cont./

602 avoids pronouncing the name of his wife. When the wife's father
[606] and mother first visit their son-in-law, he must offer them presents in the same way as when he himself with his wife first visits the wife's parents.

## V.

## Mourning and Burial of the Dead

758
574 In general the Abkhaz are very compassionate towards the sick and never leave alone a person who is seriously ill. When the villagers are informed that one of their number is seriously ill, all of them without fail will visit him, inquire about his illness, encourage him, and try to cheer him. The patient is visited not only by his relatives, but also by all the other villagers, irrespective of their title or means. They usually come to visit the patient in the evening and spend the whole night with him, singing, dancing, or telling stories, making jokes, etc., with the object of somehow /27/ cheering the invalid and relieving his sufferings in one way or another. The sick are treated with home remedies, old wise-women say prayers over them, etc.

763 As soon as a patient dies, the women instantly break out in deafening wails and soul-shaking screams, at the same time tearing out their hair, scratching their bodies, beating themselves on the face and head, and so on. Meanwhile the whole
764 neighborhood gathers, and the weeping and sobbing increase. Some women closely related to the deceased begin to beat themselves, striking their heads against something or other; the others try to soothe and quiet them. But all these admonitions frequently have no effect on the frenzied mourners, who, as a result of the blows they have inflicted upon their own heads and bodies and of beating their heads against something, fall down as if dead. When quiet finally prevails, the funeral ceremony is arranged. The next of kin sew themselves mourning apparel,
[203] and messengers are sent out with notices and invitations to the relatives, foster parents, friends, and acquaintances of the deceased; his fellow villagers on the other hand are obliged

/27 cont./

764 [203] to come to the mourning ceremony without being invited. The deceased is put in a coffin. The women in mourning apparel, barefooted, their dresses torn, bloody scratches on their faces, and their hair loose, arrange themselves behind the coffin. From the other side the male and female mourners approach the coffin. The arrangement of the lamentations is as follows. Let us suppose that four or five women are coming to bewail the deceased. As soon as they enter the yard, they immediately start weeping and shouting "avav," and at the same time they put their fingers to their temples and continue to scratch their faces with them down to the chin until they have finished their "avav." The women sitting by the coffin answer their "avav" with the same exclamation. The mourners slowly approach the house. Their wails and sobs gradually become louder; finally they enter the house, where the real communal mourning takes place. The mourners enter the house, beating their foreheads and breasts; they kneel down before the coffin and thus bewail the deceased.

In another part of the house the belongings of the deceased are put on display, his clothes and his weapons. After the mourning of the deceased, weeping and sobbing are done over his belongings also.

Sympathy for the relatives of the deceased is expressed by [195] visitors in the following manner: "Had this but not happened to you; had you but heard of my death instead, etc."

764 608 /28/ The foster mother of the deceased or her children, when they come to bewail the ward, break out in wails and cries even a verst from the house. In the yard they are met by people who have been stationed there for this purpose and who lead them by the hand into the house. This does not prevent the new arrivals from scratching their cheeks and necks on the way until they bleed, nor from beating their heads against the house-posts until they fall down before the coffin half-dead and with tears flowing. The foster father and his children likewise beat their heads and faces.

764 [1065] On the day of the funeral, lamentation for the deceased is general. Then, after the mourning, a funeral repast is arranged and all the guests are treated to bread, wine, and lenten fare, and by evening the deceased is buried.

/28 cont./

766 It is necessary to point out one more characteristic feature. When the head of a family dies and the sad procession has just started out for the burial-ground with his remains, a rope is thrown over his house; the ends are held by two people who pull it first one way and then the other. The meaning of this curious custom, which is also widespread in Mingrelia, is the following: with the death of the head of a family and the removal of his body to the burial-ground, the house begins to shake and threatens to collapse, and in order to avert this they have recourse to the rope. After the body has been carried out and the house remains undamaged, a rifle is fired as a sign of joy.

764 Graves for men are dug waist-deep, for women still deeper, [562] because in the opinion of certain Abkhaz, women in general are sly and cunning (paivan), and the Abkhaz proverb says, "Don't [539] tell your wife what is on your mind or she will crawl out even from her grave and divulge your secret." Therefore a deceased woman is buried deeper and covered with more earth.

When the deceased has been placed in the grave, it is rimmed with wooden boards and earth is poured in from above.

The Abkhaz do not have special burial-grounds. Each family has its own burial-ground. More often, high and mountainous places near a common road serve as burial-grounds. The tourist or traveler will easily observe that in Abkhazia the best and most poetic spots are occupied by graveyards.

765 The attention paid to the deceased continues long after his burial. The mother and the wife of the departed, his foster mother or her daughters, dressed in mourning and barefoot, visit the fresh grave every day, morning and evening, and bitterly bewail the deceased /29/ and beg him to assist them in various daily troubles, to intercede for them with other deceased persons, to give them their regards, etc. This continues up to 40 days or until the "Saturday mourning banquet." Until this time, the belongings of the deceased are displayed in the house and mourners as they arrive first weep over these belongings and then also over the grave. Likewise until this time, and often for the duration of a full year, a portion for the deceased is placed on

/29 cont./

765 the table at every breakfast and supper.

On the fortieth day, or on one of the Saturdays, the mourning banquet for the deceased is held. A ram is killed and meat dishes are prepared. The relatives of the deceased, who up to [785] this time have been fasting, do not break their fast until this day. The mother and the foster mother, however, fast for a whole year.

The second mourning-banquet involves even greater expenditures. This banquet is called aphskhuvra /see foreign text/ (1).

1. aphs = soul; khu = lot, order; vra = to do, to carry out; i.e., the giving of the banquet in honor of the soul of the deceased.

On this occasion animals are killed, much is spent, and an effort is made to satisfy the soul of the deceased as well as possible. [795] The Abkhaz are convinced that an unsatisfied soul can harm not only their property, but also themselves. This banquet is held in the second year after the death of the departed, more often in the autumn when there is an abundance of everything.

For the day of the aphskhuvra guests are invited to bewail the deceased. Sometimes marula (horse-races) are also organized [541] on this same day in honor of the deceased. If the races have been [202] planned beforehand, everybody is informed in good time by messengers. Meanwhile the hosts are preparing ample supplies of provisions, animals, wine, cheese, bread, etc. On the eve of the aphskhuvra, the belongings of the deceased are on display, and the horse of the departed is tethered near them, covered with a mourning blanket. The deceased's weapons are hung on the saddle of his horse, his rifle, pistol, dagger, saber, whip, etc.; subsequently there is lamentation at the grave with the remains.

And then this scene takes place: a crowd of people of both [302] sexes stand around, barefoot and in mourning. The men's hair is braided, as is the women's. People on foot and on horseback [262] approach them, each of them leading one or two bulls, or a few

/29 cont./

[765] rams, and, in general, whatever they can afford; furthermore
[262] they bring various sweetmeats prepared with butter and with honey, and also matsoni (sour /30/ milk), etc. One person in the procession holds in his hand a branching, tree-like candle, to which is fastened a strip of calico, green in color and soaked in wax. At the ends of the larger and smaller branches similar strips are hung, which are stirred by the wind like the leaves of a tree. (If the procession takes place at night, a few lighted candles are fastened to the branching candle as well as to the horns of bulls). Slowly the sad procession approaches the house and enters the yard, where it is met by the others. Here there is wailing and lamentation by the men and women separately.
[782] After this the bulls and rams are killed, each with the words, "It is offered to your soul."

The next day, i.e., on the day of the aphskhuvra, a great number of people gather. By noon one of the relatives of the deceased unties his horse and stands in the middle of a meadow, while the men and women form a circle around him. Then the horse is led around the circle three times, with the deceased's next of kin following behind, barefoot, bare-headed, in mourning attire, and weeping bitterly. The men beat their breasts and faces. The women stand in a circle divided into two groups alternately crying "avav." This ceremony ends with the horse being led out of the circle. From this time on, all earthly signs (remains) of the deceased are considered to have been destroyed; up to this time the deceased has been considered to be invisibly present in the gathering.

After this the guests seat themselves at a dinner. On the meadow, under the open sky, a long tablecloth has been spread out for them and various dishes have been prepared. Particularly
[262] noteworthy are spoons, cups, glasses, thimbles, etc. made out of cheese. The candles described above are placed there, too.

It must be noted that even though this banquet involves great expense, it is not burdensome to the hosts, since the expenses are shared, not only by the relatives, but also by the whole village where such a funeral repast is held.

/30 cont./

765
526 After the meal, the dzhiriti takes place, reminiscent of the tournaments of the Middle Ages. Now the fair sex occupies the passageway near the house. Young men on horseback assemble in front of the beauties and vie with each other in attempts to display their wit, inventiveness, and knowledge in speeches, and their bravery in the dzhigitovka /trick-riding/ which will follow.

The main dzhigitovka, tarchei /see foreign text/, consists of the following. One of the competing riders accepts from the host of the feast /31/ or from one of the beauties some strips of chintz, a small sewn boot, a rosary of chestnuts, or something else, and, holding this tarchei in his hand, he gallops ahead with it while the other lads pursue him and try to catch him and take away the tarchei. If someone is successful in this, the tarchei passes into the hands of the one who has taken it away from the first rider; then that one races off, and the others again chase after him. The one who escapes capture and manages to bring the tarchei back to the place where the competition started is the winner. The horsemen's competition does not end with this, however; they continue to prance around on horseback, pick up money from the ground at full gallop, etc.

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541 Sometimes there are also horse-races at the mourning banquet. Children of eight to nine years of age are horsemen. A goal is pointed out to the competitors, and the first one to reach it wins something. In this case, the hosts present the winners with the horse of the deceased, with some animal, or with a khak (arshin or span) of chintz.

## VI.

## Religious Beliefs of the Abkhaz

771 "Up to the year 1867," wrote Mr. A. in his excellent article on the Abkhaz, "the religious situation among the Abkhaz was absurd in the extreme. One found there the rites of all religious doctrines, from fetishism to Christianity. These people had no precise conception of any religion, but adopted from all of them

/31 cont./

771 whatever stood out most sharply and acted most strongly upon their almost childish imagination" (1). Madame Giorgidze says: "At

1. See Sborn. sved. o kavk. gorts., No. V.

present the majority of the Abkhaz profess the Christian religion, the minority Mohammedan. In spite of this, the Abkhaz is little informed in either of the two religions and is really a heathen rather than Christian or Moslem" (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888.

1.

775 766 The Souls of the Dead -- Their Wanderings on Earth

The Abkhaz believes that human life does not end with earthly existence, but that it continues after death, /32/ or, in the words of the Abkhaz, "on the other side." He believes, in addition, that this life beyond the grave continues at the very place where the deceased is buried. It is not enough, therefore, to take a drowned body out of the river to bury it, for the soul of the deceased must also be evoked from the water and brought into the grave in which the body of the drowned man is buried. This is the ceremony of the evocation and capture of a drowned person's soul. Men and women gather on both sides of the river from which the corpse of the drowned man has been recovered. Across the river, from one bank to the other, a silk thread is stretched, from which a leather knapsack is hung, its lower end almost touching the water. The men and women then begin to the sound of the balalaika. The Abkhaz is convinced that the soul of the dead leaves the water and enters the knapsack when it hears the sounds of the balalaika and the singing. When the Abkhaz think that the soul has entered the bag, one of the men jumps into the water and ties it up. They then carry the

[534] [533]

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knapsack with great rejoicing to the burial-ground, where, through a hole drilled in the knapsack, the captured soul passes into the grave of the one who drowned.

In Abkhazia the dead are highly honored. The burial-grounds, as we have said, lie on high, picturesque places and are surrounded by fences. Shingled houses of a kind the Abkhaz do not make for themselves are built over the graves. Near the graves various fruit trees are planted -- apple, pear, peach, quince, etc. On the graves themselves the Abkhaz lay slices of melons, watermelons, cucumbers, etc. All this serves to confirm the belief that beyond the grave the souls of the dead require food, drink, lodging, etc., just like the living.

And in fact the Abkhaz do believe that the dead will enjoy, for example, the piece of melon placed on the grave. Because of this belief, for almost a full year after a death, a special share of each meal is laid on the table for the deceased, and banquets are held in his memory, etc. Besides this, annual funeral-feasts are held on the eve of the paternal Saturday for those recently deceased, and on the paternal Saturday itself funeral-feasts are held for those deceased longer. At the slaughter of the sacrificial animal, the head of the family says, "If there is a life beyond the grave, here is this (offering) to your soul." Then as food is prepared and placed on the tablecloth, the head of the family stands in front of the tablecloth and again says, "Deceased ones /33/, grant us the blessing of your souls! Do not harm us by death (mortification)! Make us and our cattle increase (multiply)! etc. At the conclusion of this invocation, he makes the sign of the cross in the air over the tablecloth with an iron spit and says, "All this, prepared by the power of fire and water, is sacrificed to your souls, if indeed there be a life beyond the grave." Having said this, the head of the family takes a glass of wine and drinks it; after this he puts pieces of the heart and liver from the sacrificed animal into a slice of gomi, pours a little wine over it, and throws it into the yard, saying: "And this is for you, guiding and escorting souls." From this we perceive that in Abkhaz belief the living relatives of the dead

/33 cont./

775 769 are visited by the souls of the deceased, together with other souls accompanying them. The Abkhaz believes that the more magnificently they (souls of the deceased)are met and treated, the more satisfied and generous they will be and the more co-operation and patronage they will give the living -- in the opposite situation, they would only harm the living. Those souls satisfied with their reception, upon their return to the souls of other deceased relatives, express their joy and praise the esteem paid them; unsatisfied souls, however, return extremely irritated and, when asked by the other souls about their reception, answer, "What could we have found there, if they themselves turn out to be just such dead ones as we?" The Abkhaz believe that in this case the unsatisfied souls' most terrible anger will fall on several members of the family that has thus failed to receive their relatives' souls in a proper manner.

The Abkhaz believe firmly that the souls of the deceased leave their graves and visit their living kin. They stand near [782] their houses and whistle; they are placated by the pouring of wine or the throwing out of something. These souls of the dead like to leave their graves, particularly at night; they stand near the road and when they see a traveler they run after him in pursuit. Let us hear how the Abkhaz themselves report the significance of funeral banquets:

1. "Sesrkva was a well-known and brave man. During one raid, he lost his hundred companions in a skirmish; they were all killed. Sesrkva slaughtered a large number of bulls and rams and arranged a funeral banquet for his companions. Afterwards he himself was /34/ killed in a skirmish and buried none knew where. A friend of his expressed the wish to find Sesrkva's grave in order to mourn for him. After a lengthy search he at last found it and mourned Sesrkva, and because his village was far away and the hour late, he decided to spend the night right there. Having tied his horse to a tree, he lay down under an oak and soon fell asleep. He then dreamed that Sesrkva's hundred lads were in an excellent position in the other world; they were satisfied with everything, for they treated their guests honorably and fed their horses well. But Sesrkva himself and his horse

/34 cont./

775 were wandering about hungry, feeding only upon the charity of the
769 hundred men. Having seen Sesrkva the hero in such a state, his friend asked him, Sesrkva! You surpassed everyone in the wide world. What has befallen you in the life beyond the grave that you are unable to receive even one guest? Sesrkva answered, How then can I receive guests, when I must beg for myself and my horse? When he awakened, his friend realized that no funeral banquet had been held for Sesrkva, so he immediately arranged a rich funeral-banquet for him. Once more he had a dream: Sesrkva was now in as good a condition as his hundred companions and was able to receive guests."

2. "Two persons were walking along; one of them had a fat goat, skinned and cut up, hidden in a sack. In the evening someone began to pursue them, whistling as he ran. The man with the load said to him, Leave me alone! What do you want of me? Having said this, he went his way, but the ghost followed him. His companion guessed what was the matter and advised the friend to cut off a piece of meat to throw to the ghost. The advice was taken and the piece of meat thrown -- the whistling and the pursuit stopped immediately."

3. "The people of Mokvi every year arranged their funeral banquets for the dead, who were buried in the upper part of the burial-ground, while the people of Morkvuli did not do this for the dead buried in the lower part of the burial-ground. Therefore the Mokvi dead mocked the Morkvuli dead; 'You who find nothing!' The others responded to this: 'When our kinsmen find something for themselves, we shall get something, too.' The dead gathered together at night and held dances on the aphstsa r kvashartha (place for the dances of the dead). Everybody could see the footprints of the dancing souls."

794 /35/ The souls of the dead as well as those of the living,
795 and in particular those of the witches, are capable from time
754 to time of wandering about with evil intentions, as sucking milk from nipples, drawing out the heart and liver, etc. Even the water element will not accept witches, and they do not drown in water. They have their own chief, Roskipi, who dwells

/35 cont./

upon the summit of the mountain Tabakona. They are divided into groups according to their degree of power: the younger ones usually travel upon mice, frogs, cats, etc., the older ones on foxes, wolves, etc. On Assumption Eve they are all obliged to gather upon the Tabakona for the annual report of their deeds to their sovereign, Roskipi, and to produce material proof of their industrious service -- a heart taken from a man or animal, a liver, eyes, nails, hair, etc. To avoid attack from witches, the Abkhaz take the following measures: during the fast of the Assumption they erect crosses and stick candles in their hair, and on the eve of the Assumption they shoot off rifles, sing, and spend the whole night in vigil. The Abkhaz believes that a witch can simultaneously be at home, among people, and on top of the mountain Tabakona. The Abkhaz explain such a splitting-up of a person by saying that it is not the witch herself that wanders about, but her accessory soul (aphschchda = superfluous soul).

2.

ooo

The True God -- Paganism -- The Principal and Secondary Gods of the Abkhaz -- Causes of Polytheism -- "Creators" and "Forgers" -- Fate or Predestination.

To assist the supreme-being, endowed with all the qualities with which, according to our understanding, God is endowed, says Mr. A., Abkhaz mythology added a number of other deities, assigning to each his particular designation. These assisting deities, according to their understanding, were created by the Almighty before man and the universe came into being, and people at prayer appeal through them to God himself. God himself never descends to earth, but if he needs to punish someone or to grant someone his grace, he sends out one of his assistants. In the prayers which are said and sung at sacrifices and other

/35 cont./

776 religious ceremonies, the Abkhaz addresses God thus: Akhdau
[782] (or antsa-daukva) /36/ zlypkha-khkhaura, which means "Great God, merciful one, gracious one."

Besides this merciful god, the Abkhaz, as we have said, have other secondary gods, whose creation was necessitated by the people's needs. Every atmospheric phenomenon, every danger threatening a man or his property, every type of toil assuring the existence of man created in the childish imaginations of these people separate, invisible protectors, ruling over all. These deities have no images, since they appear in different forms according to the circumstances; nevertheless, according to the understanding of the Abkhaz, not to be doubted, for it is felt in all the good and evil that can happen in the life of a person. Every step of a man is under their control and every departure from the true way immediately evokes punishment by them.

174 As science has proved by a multitude of analogous examples
776 from other primitive peoples, there can be no doubt that nature and its phenomena have played an enormous role in the development of the religious ideas and theistic images of the Abkhaz people. Their childlike mentality and imagination were undoubtedly strongly influenced by the azure sky, resting like an immense vault upon the earth, now threateningly and severely looking down from behind the clouds, now smiling with its fiery eyes, the sun by day and the moon and the stars by night. Mother Earth herself also exerted her influence upon them, for she is indeed mother, nurse, provider, and source of blessings and abundance; nor did the sun, the "eye of heaven," giving warmth and life to the whole world, remain without influence on their childlike imaginations, nor the moon, the "guard of night," which quietly floats on the vault of the sky and conquers the darkness of night; the threatening thunder bolt, instilling terror and destroying everything in its way; the air, now quiet and friendly and still, now threateningly perturbed and howling; the colorful, beautiful rainbow, this "belt" of the sky; the dawn, that "gate of Day"... All this and much else, of course, greatly

/35 cont./

776 [194] affected man in his infant stage; no wonder the Abkhaz personifies and deifies all these, together with trees, woods, fields, etc.; he deifies some things because they bring him help, others because they do him harm. Accordingly, Abkhaz mythology created special protective deities for every activity /37/ of man, whether agriculture, industry, art, or herding. Some of these are, for instance: Aithar, the protector of cattle; Dzhadzha, god of sowing; Shasha, god of the smithy, and others. Many of these deities are female; for instance, the protector of the element of water, "mother of the water," is a woman; the earth itself is personified as a woman; there is also a "lady-wind"; the ancestor of cattle is female, as is the ancestor of nanny-goats; the god of sowing, Dzhadzha, and others are also female.

777 776 [194] Besides these deities, there are the Ashatsa-chaphatsa, the "creator" and "forger" gods. There are either two of them, or many. Under the influence of Christianity, they are presented in the form of angels. "Every soul" is born through Ashatsa-chaphatsa. They determine the future of the newborn child, his happiness and unhappiness, the length of his life and the hour of his death, and they make an inscription on his forehead (lakhints'ara /see foreign text/) concerning all this. The Abkhaz is certain that these inscriptions on the forehead exist and believes that anyone can confirm it with his own eyes. Incidentally, let us tell an Abkhaz tale that illustrates the inevitability of predestination or fate.

777 776 539 In the night two men set out to steal. On the way they were caught in a heavy rainstorm. They took refuge under the porch of a peasant's hut. Peeping in, they saw a group of women gathered, among them a woman in labor, who shortly afterwards gave birth to a girl. The "creators" and "forgers" did not hesitate to appear. One of them said, "The newborn girl shall become the wife of one of the thieves outside that are looking in. This shall be his fate." The second of the "creators" and "forgers" confirmed the words of the first. The thief, already middle-aged, said on hearing this, "I am not young even now, and she has just

/37 cont./

777 been born; God save me from such a marriage." And so he
776 planned to kill the newborn baby; when everyone in the
539 house had fallen asleep, he slipped quietly in, carried the child out, ripped open her belly, and threw it upon the flat roof of the hut. Then the two thieves went on their way. The child's wailing awakened the women, who found her, sewed up the wound with silk thread, and thus saved her from death. And no matter how hard the thief about whom the above-mentioned prophecy was made tried to find a wife, he was /38/ unsuccessful. Meanwhile the girl who he thought was dead reached marriageable age and one day somehow met the thief. He immediately fell in love with her and married her. Then it was shown how inevitably every predestination and decision made by the "creator-forgers" is fulfilled.

## VII.

### Prayers in Honor of the Deities

782 Prayer is the name given to those religious ceremonies and rites accompanied by sacrifices in honor of the gods which are performed according to a definite pattern set and sanctified from olden times.

[776] Each deity may independently show, within his sphere of activity, grace or wrath toward man; for instance, he may send sickness or misfortune on him or his cattle, etc.
[787] The Abkhaz easily determine by special signs whether the deities' anger is the result of deviations from the fixed pattern
[688] of the religious rites. To avert the wrath of the gods caused by omissions in prayers and sacrifices, they must repeat the offerings and complete whatever was omitted the first time; uncorrected omissions and mistakes in ritual weigh heavily as guilt felt toward the angry gods, even upon generations
[755] far removed from the sinners. If anyone falls ill in conse-
[753] quence of neglect in ritual toward one or another god, he must offer him a sacrifice in order to recover. If he is

/38 cont./

782 unable to perform that act because of his sickness, he then
755 presents something as a pledge, saying, "If you (God) are
753 sending this (sickness) because of my guilt, then relieve me; I shall pray to you as is fitting and as the sorcerer will instruct me." But when he does not know which deity is angry and is causing his sickness, he says, "No matter what caused this illness, I shall do whatever the sorcerers may recommend." The pledge is specially set aside as a sacred object until his vow is fulfilled. The performers of prayers during such religious rituals are men or women, depending upon the sex of the deity in whose honor the ceremony is performed.

I shall proceed to a description of the ceremonies themselves.

1.

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782 The Ceremony in Honor of Mother Earth
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A sinless woman, taking six nuts and a few grains of millet, leads the sick one to an alder tree. Here she carries the three nuts and several grains of millet around the tree in the name of the earth; then she does the same thing around a nut-tree (walnut) in the name of Adabna, begging him to have pity on the sick person. She then makes
[532] a richly-dressed doll in the image of a man, buries it in
[789] the earth for the "liberation" of the sick person, and says, "Play and amuse yourself with this instead of with the sick one." After this, a large millet-loaf is baked -- "the bread of Mother Earth" -- and two other long loaves of bread for Adabna. The same woman takes a piece from each of the four sides of the first loaf, both the loaves in honor of Adabna, a candle, and incense, and with the sick person goes to the crossing of three roads, where she places the pieces of the millet-loaf at one road, the two loaves of Adabna at the second, and at the third she lights the candles and places chevyaki (shoes) there, saying; "Mistress Earth, these are your shoes!" She then places the sick person on his knees

/39 cont./

782 among the articles so laid out, with a "chikila" (a kind of
755 veil) on his head, and begs, "Adgil-ankhu, Atula-ankhuse, grant him your favor! Give him firmness of head, heart, and body! Give him color, skin, and bone! Give him back the will to speak and to work! Give him strength! Deliver him from evil," etc. In the same way she also prays to Adabna. After this, she removes the chikila from the sick person with a nut-twig, raises him, strikes him on the back with a whip, and says, "Go, from this day I grant you freedom (azati)," and then both go home. At home a loaf of millet-bread is broken in two; two women each take a half and stand on the two sides of the hearth opposite each other; the sick person passes three times between them under the loaf, while one of the women exclaims, "Give me the one who has assumed the Hebrew belief," and the other, "Give me the convert to Christianity."

753 The Abkhaz is convinced that the invisible being that
755 settled in the sick man hastens immediately upon leaving him to enter someone else, and so, to help him find a new victim, they pray to him at the crossroads, where there is a continuous /40/ traffic of people, and, subsequently, a victim is always found it is unnecessary to search very long. And since an illness can be caught from a spot where a person accidentally fell or sat down, the rite of appeasing the
[823] earth must be performed on the very same spot of the falling or sitting from which the sickness originated; the doll must be buried on exactly the same spot. This is why, in order not to catch something evil from the spot where he sat down,
[789] the Abkhaz spits three times on getting up and says, "Here stood the house and courtyard of my grandfather!"

2.

The Ceremony in Honor of the Water

782 When someone is ill for a long time with a fever, a
755 female fortune-teller is asked for advice and help; she usually
791

/40 cont./

782 prescribes a prayer to the water, which is thought to be the
755 cause of the illness. Since the protectress of the waters,
[791] the "Mother of Water," is a woman, a sinless old woman is invited to the ceremony.

776 A large, clear, inaccessible fresh-water lake is thought
[778] to be the residence of the "Mother of Water"; she may also dwell in a pure spring, untouched by anything unclean, such as a pig, etc. The "Mother of Water" sometimes comes out of her dwelling to the shore, and at that time anyone may see her. This is how the Abkhaz describe this "Mother of Water." She is a most beautiful, bewitching woman; her locks are incomparable and chestnut in color; her eyes are laughing. The Abkhaz who has been bewitched by her talks
753 to his comrades thus: "Eh, brothers, I have been vanquished
776 by the 'Mother of the Water,' and from now on I no longer
539 belong to your society. Recently I rode into a dense forest and saw a table spread there under a big oak; a mirror and a lighted candle stood nearby; the 'Mother of the Water' was sitting in front of the mirror, smiling at her own beauty and combing her long hair, which reached the ground. My arms fell to my sides from exhaustion; I could not take my eyes from that wonderful vision. When she saw me, she quickly arranged her hair and came towards me. I felt giddy... Without a word she raised all ten fingers, asking me, 'Are you willing to be my husband for ten years or not?' I shook my head, but she would not stop, and with the proper number of fingers raised, she offered me in turn nine, eight, seven years, and so on /41/ of marriage. As I kept on refusing, she finally raised her last little finger and fixed her gaze upon me. I immediately gave my consent..." (1).

1. "Etnograf, pis'ma iz Abkhazii /Ethnographical letters from Abkhazia/," Konst. Machavariani, Droeba, 1884-1885.

755
782 The "pure" old woman who was invited to the ceremony,

/41 cont./

755 782 unnoticed by the occupants of the house of the sick, takes some object belonging to the sick person, e.g., a dress, etc., and goes to the river. Standing on the bank, she says, "Mother of the Water, mistress, if the sick person was bound by you, unbind him"; she then touches the water three times with the object belonging to the sick person and scoops up a few drops of it with alder leaves, which she carefully carries home, where she fastens them to the ceiling above the hearth, convinced that the fever will then disappear like the water in the leaves; then she runs out of the house with the words, "May your sickness also run away like this."

[756] If the sick person feels relief after this, a praying-woman is invited in, a hen and a rooster are prepared with a stuffed loaf of unleavened bread, and three candles are molded, which are distributed in the following manner: the hen and one candle are allotted to the "Mother of the Water," the rooster and the second candle to her husband, and the third candle to their maid-servant, called Abzahav-Abzachav (benefactress). The sick person goes to the water with the praying-woman and kneels down. The praying-woman takes a candle, lights it and places it near the water, and addresses a prayer for the relief of the sick person to the "Mother of the Water" -- dzdzlan dzahvvazh khiphsha gvasha ("Mother of the Water," "mistress of the water," Khiphsha Gvasha); she lights another candle and makes the same request of the "lord husband" of the "Mother of the Water, finally she sets in place the third lighted candle and begs the maid-servant to serve as intercessor and mediator for the afflicted one with her "masters." Then she passes her hand over the sick person's back and gives him "azati" (liberty) from his ailment.

782 585 844 A similar ceremony is performed for the young bride on the occasion when she is for the first time "led out to the water" (i.e., taken to fetch water); it is also performed for a woman in labor so that she may have plentiful milk. In this case, if the ceremony cannot be performed in full, an egg for the "Mother of the Water" is thrown into the water during the prayer.

/41 cont./

515 782 823 [783] Fearing to defile it, the Abkhaz avoids bathing in running water; if he bathes, upon coming out /42/ of the water he takes three stones and says, "I sinned against you today; I went into the water and bathed, but you, forgive me." With this prayer, he passes the pebbles around his head with his hands and throws them into the water.

3.

The Ceremony in Honor of the Rainbow

753 [755] [782] The ceremony in honor of the rainbow, which is not obligatory for all, is performed for the greater part on persons whose sickness, according to the female fortune-teller, is caused by the rainbow. A prolonged yellowness of the face, a weakening of the organism, instability of character -- the [821] Abkhaz attributes all these to the fact that the sick person entered water at the very moment when the rainbow was drinking from it.

755 782 "Sinless" old women, having planned a sacrifice and promised a prayer, lead the sick person out to a brook; they take with them two fried capons, two stuffed loaves of unleavened bread in the shape of a tongue, and other provisions, as in the performance of the ceremony in honor of the water. On both sides of the brook, clean objects are laid out, such as clothes, silver, etc., a little bridge made of thread is thrown over the river from one bank to another. Having prepared all this, the praying-woman, with a doll that has been prepared beforehand in her hands, walks around the sick person, who is kneeling down covered with a piece of calico, and prays for him to the rainbow, known by the name Eliaphshi; then she takes a candle and addresses a similar prayer to the "Mistress Mother of the Water," and her "lord husband." After praying over the provisions she takes some [789] of each dish and throws it into the water; she places the doll in a pumpkin, and, after adorning the latter with lighted

/42 cont./

755 candles, she lets it float down the stream, saying, "Amuse
782 yourself with this one, instead of the sick person." Finally
[789] the old praying-woman passes her hand over the sick person's back, raises him, and having given him liberty ("azati") from his ailment, she sends him home, instructing him not to look around on his way back. The food brought to the stream is eaten on the spot by the participants in the ceremony; the remains from the table are thrown into the water and the dishes washed clean.

This prayer-ritual is considered the most sacred of all in Abkhazia, and the name of the rainbow, Atsaqva, is pronounced with great reverence. The Abkhaz claims that as
[821] a consequence of this ceremony in the rainbow's honor the rain appears.

4.

/43/

782 The Prayer-Ceremony in Honor of the Wind (Phsharnha)

A large loaf of bread with cheese is prepared, placed in a basket, and carried some distance from the house. Here
[776] a prayer is said to "Lady Wind" (a deity of female sex), in
[821] which she is asked to bring good and to carry off evil and to
[777] deliver them from all sorts of misfortunes, etc. Then the middle part of the loaf is cut out, carried into the forest, and hung on an oak tree near the top. The next day, the one who first comes near the oak tree feasts on this offering.

5.

A Prayer in Honor of a Tree

782 On Assumption Day, vitushki are baked according to
824 the number of men in the family; then the master of the house, with his household, approaches any kind of young tree and, putting his foot on it, prays, "Tree, give me your blessing and happiness ... that I may safely come down

/43 cont./
782 from the treetop. May the fresh twig, when I step on it with
824 my foot, first grow stronger and then, being strengthened, grow fresh (soft), etc."

6.

782 A Prayer in Honor of Adnqa or (the same thing) "the
755 Outer Ones"

[775] The souls of the dead, the "outer ones," are often the
[753] cause of sickness in man and his cattle. They often become angry, and the outward signs of such anger are frequent yawning, sleepiness, and general exhaustion visited upon the culprit. If the one afflicted does not satisfy the angered "outer ones" with offerings and prayers, an inevitable death awaits him. On one of the Saturdays a meal is prepared of young rams' meat, chicken, sour milk, and the meat of a cow, if the soul of a woman is angered, and all these provisions are laid out on a tablecloth under the eaves, on both sides of which are placed a dress and valuable /44/ objects.

The sick man or woman is placed in the middle of a circle and either a man or a woman, according to the sex of the sick person, prays and begs the living and the dead (Angi-phsngis) to have mercy upon the sick and to grant him health and to accept the food prepared for them. The person pronouncing the prayer for the sick one then passes his hand over the back of the sick person and gives him freedom from his sickness ("azati"). If the ailment is thought to be caused by the soul of a prince or of some other personage of
[825] high rank, a tethered horse is untied and released in a field at the concluding words of the prayer: "This (horse) is for your soul." According to Abkhaz belief, such a horse soon swells up and dies.

/44 cont./

7.

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[776] The Prayer Ceremony in Honor of Azhahara

The Abkhaz call the protector or genius of the house and hearth by the name Azhahara in whose honor is performed the ceremony for a young married couple in the stage of their marriage before they have appeared together before their elders and the young woman is for the first time led into her husband's main house, or when the bride is invited into her father's house. One of the oldest members of the family sticks pieces of the heart and liver of a sacrificial animal on a spit and begs Azhahara to protect the young couple at home and out of doors.

8.

Alishkantra

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[776] Alishkantra is the "mistress" of dogs. In the opinion of the Abkhaz, the owner of good dogs will also be fortunate in the multiplication of his cattle; good fortune in dogs is associated with good fortune in all domestic animals. Therefore before praying to other god-protectors of domestic and wild animals, the Abkhaz prays to Alishkantra to grant him luck with good dogs and the opportunity to raise and breed them.

9.

/45/ A Prayer in Honor of Zhabran

[776]
[796
262] Zhabran is the protector of animals. Every Abkhaz owning cattle performs the prayer-ceremony in his honor on "Cheese Saturday." For this they prepare suluguni (a big cheese) called "sacred cheese"; bread dough is placed on the hearth, in which a man puts a core of suluguni, whereupon he prays, "Prefer me to all those pronouncing your name;

/45 cont./

782 make my cattle multiply; make them increase to such an
231 extent that in the future I may pray to you and offer you a cheese as big as this loaf of bread and my courtyard will have no room for all my cattle. Preserve my cattle from all trouble and misfortunes both at home and outside; grant that my cattle will lose only old hair and dung; grant that my herd will be so large that an animal walking in the rear will be unable to overtake one running in the front; may the calves play like young bears and shine like young stallions. This I ask of you." Then the person praying puts three walnut branches in the bread dough and, striking against the ceiling, exclaims, "Voots! chiphsh!" (a call to summon cattle). The same ceremony is performed on the Thursday of "Cheese-
[796] week" in honor of the protector of goats; it is called Dzhabran.

10.

A Prayer in Honor of Aithar

[796] Aithar is the protector of domestic cattle and the
[796] farm economy. The prayers to him are held on a Saturday, except during Lent, because offerings to him must consist of milk products, and among the rich the offering is a milk-fed calf. The customary dish at this time is a thin gruel made with the milk of a cow that has recently calved. The shepherds stand around a kettle or pot filled with gruel; the oldest of them, holding a wax candle, pronounces a prayer: "Aithar, grant me superiority above all those who pronounce your name." He then begs Aithar to increase his herds and to protect them from beasts of prey. Upon concluding /46/ the prayer, the shepherd throws three spoonfuls of gruel into a brazier with coals standing nearby, and the participants eat the rest. If the inhabitants of the whole village or a part of it perform the ceremony in honor of Aithar, then a calf is sacrificed, which is slaughtered by the most respected old man, who first pronounces a prayer. After the meat of the calf has been cooked or roasted, the same old man

/46 cont./

782 231 pronounces a prayer the second time, cutting off pieces from different parts of the animal and offering them to Aithar by throwing them on the red-hot coals.

11.

Azhvephshaa (Abn-intsvakhu)

782 224 776 796 Azhvephshaa is the god of the forests and wild animals. Hunters sacrifice to him before setting out on a hunt, usually the middle or at the end of December. For the sacrifice, they jointly buy a ram or a goat. When it is roasted, the oldest huntsman prays to Azhvephshaa to send success for their undertaking; at the conclusion of the prayers, he throws small pieces of roasted meat and a piece of incense on the coals. Each of the remaining hunters repeats the prayer in turn, adding his own wishes and indicating the particular animal he would like to kill, while throwing pieces of incense on the coals.

12.

Dzhadzha and Anaphanga

787 24 776 796 Dzhadzha is the patroness of the crops. Prayers to her are offered twice a year: in March, at the beginning of spring, and in November, after the maize has been stored. Praying to Dzhadzha is not accompanied by any special solemnity; it is performed quietly by each individual family. Rich landowners sometimes invite their former dependents to the prayer, particularly those who have taken part in the sowing and reaping of their crops. On the day set aside for prayer, dishes made exclusively of grain and fruits grown by the master of the house are prepared. After the food has been placed on the table, the oldest member of the family /47/ addresses a prayer to Dzhadzha, thanking him for the good harvest or begging him to send everything in abundance. For the spring prayer to Dzhadzha, all the dishes prepared are lenten.

/47 cont./

[782 241 776] The Abkhaz asks of Anaphanga, the goddess of crops: "Wherever I draw my furrow and strike with iron and with implement, may an abundance of grain be granted me; grant happiness to the sower and to the consumer." During reaping, when the sheaves are first brought home, the Abkhaz prays in honor of Anaphanga; during the fast of Assumption, however, a cross is made of the ears; kernels of maize and beans are fastened to a candle to avert possible harm by evil spirits, e.g., by Dzhadzha herself. This [776] Dzhadzha is an ugly goddess, short and fat; when she comes into a field she exclaims, "Natsvis, natsvis" (little finger! little finger!), i.e., the wish that the maize in that field grow no higher than a little finger, but if one pursues Dzhadzha with the words, "Raki dzaki, raki dzaki" ("cubit-span, cubit-span"), she leaves the field and her wish does not come true.

[243] Before the threshing of the gomi /millet/ the Abkhaz pray to the great goddesses to keep the whole family in good health and to permit the whole household in future, and at the head the lady of the house herself, to gather at the beater for the threshing of the gomi (satsekhveli).

13.

A Prayer for the Bees

[782 231] The Abkhaz bake a round loaf of bread with cheese, take it to the bee-garden, and pray to Ananagunda for the preservation of their bees; upon returning home, they break the loaf and eat it without looking at one another, for which some stand facing one door, some another.

14.

Prayer to the Sun and the Moon

[782 821] The Abkhaz addresses the sun with the following prayer: "Sunlight, withhold not your benevolence from us, warmth

/47 cont./

782 and light, well-being and success in everything; grant
821 beauty, charm, and elegance to our maidens so that, like you, they may shine, glitter, and warm people." In the prayer to the moon, they express the wish that the children should become like it in brilliance.

/48/ 15.

Prayer to Khphath and Khvnash

782 This prayer is offered on the Saturday of the week of
[796] Thomas, with cheese, bread, wine, candles, etc. brought as offerings. The aim is to solicit health and prosperity for the family. On one of the following Saturdays a similar prayer is addressed to Khvnash. Khphath and Mdzhath are
[551] men's names in Abkhazia.

16.

"Ananaha"

782 Anan means "mother." The oldest woman of the
796 household places some money on a loaf of bread (Anan l phara = money of Anan) and goes into the kitchen-garden where she places three cucumber-leaves on the loaf of bread and the same number on her own head. She then fastens a lighted candle to a cucumber stalk and, holding incense in her hands, prays, "Mothers and creators, do not let me have grief from my sons: do not cast me into sorrow because of them, but let me see them prosper." A similar prayer is said to Ashatsanha, the god-creator or god-father. A cow and money are offered in sacrifice to him. During Lent, the village maidens also used to pray to the "Mother of the Waters" that she might grant them long and thick hair.

17.

Prayer for the Ear

753 The Abkhaz says, "ahsa r lmha i klou," which means

/48 cont./
753 "hung on the girls' ears." Rheumatic pains in the knees,
instability of character, general weakness of the organism
of a person, etc. -- all these are consequences of a
789 "weighty cause." To avert the sickness, a button is fastened
to the ear like an earring. An innocent and sinless woman
755 leads the ailing person to a nut-bush and makes him kneel;
782 she drives seven /49/ sticks of nut-wood into the ground around
him, fastens a lighted candle to each of them, and prays
[776] on behalf of the sick person to hanipha, the genius, walking
along the rocks.

18.

Prayer in Honor of the Supreme Being

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753 This supreme being is believed to be the cause of all
kinds of sickness in man. When the body-temperature of a
seriously sick person fluctuates greatly and he is alternately
thrown into a fever and chills, when he faints or loses con-
sciousness and regains it momentarily, and then begins to
toss and become delirious, to sing songs, to mumble prayers,
etc., the Abkhaz believe that all these severe pathological
conditions are unmistakable signs of action by a superior
force, by the supreme deities (Anua r mzz) on the sick per-
son -- "there is a divine cause." The Abkhaz are convinced
that this "divine cause" has taken up its abode in the sick
person and therefore they say, Anua drthoup, i.e., "a god
755 came to visit." When the female fortune-teller confirms
[787] that the cause of the sickness is indeed that "a god took up
his abode" in the sick person, then everyone in the house
must assume a gay appearance and rejoice instead of
grieving, for "where the god has taken up his abode, there
can be nothing but rejoicing." Therefore the village youth
gathers in the house of such a patient and all begin to sing
and dance, and even the sick person is made to take part in
the dances and singing, if he is strong enough to do so.

The prayer-sacrifice is carried out near the house
[782] on the edge of a forest. The offering is a goat or a kid, a

/49 cont./

755 782 ram or a lamb, together with loaves of bread, etc. All this is taken to the place selected, and the patient himself is led there. No women are present, for they are not [562] allowed to approach this sacred place. A venerable man, holding a candle, declares, "Great god, as is proper and as the fortune-teller has prescribed, the worshiper today stands before you; he has brought sacrificial animals and loaves of bread... Have mercy upon him, be merciful to him, if he has sinned before you, forgive him. I beg you to let him go from this day forward, to leave him and free him like a loosened knot." While saying these words, the venerable man moves the candle around the patient, lights it, and places it nearby. He then /50/ takes another candle [796] and prays to Michael-Gabriel. Upon the completion of this ceremony, the sick person returns home alone, while the others sit down to a meal.

One such ceremony, however, is not considered sufficient for the send-off of so eminent a guest as a god. The [796] Abkhaz is therefore obliged to repeat the ceremony annually. One day a week is set aside as a holiday in honor of that same supreme being; this day is considered such a sacred one that the house even remains unswept, etc.

19.

Aphi

796 [821] Aphi (2) is the god and master of the thunder, lightning,

[113] 2. See Sborn. sveden. o kavk. gortsakh, No. V, Tiflis, 1871, pp. 15-16, article "Religioznyye verovaniye abkhaztsev /Religious beliefs of the Abkhaz/," by A. -- where, by the way, this deity is called Afy.

[782] and all atmospheric phenomena in general. The most solemn prayers in Abkhazia are offered in honor of this god.

/50 cont./

782 733 [796] On the day set for the prayer, usually at the time when the herds are driven into the mountains for the summer and when they return in autumn, the shepherds of the village break up into several groups, each group choosing a pretty spot in the forest near a brook or river. Some rams, according to the number of participants, are slaughtered, and the oldest shepherd of those departing for the mountains addresses Aphi, begging him to preserve them as well as their herd from the thunder-[562] bolts. Women and children do not dare to be present at the prayers to Aphi, and women may not even pronounce his name. When talking of Aphi, the Abkhaz usually say "khakhikal" ("the one above" or "the supreme one.")

782 731 789 During a prolonged drought, a prayer with sacrifices is offered in honor of Aphi. The best bull is chosen from the herd and a day is set for the sacrifice. The villagers bring gomi, bread, fresh cheese, and a jug of wine. The most venerable old man holds a rope fastened to the horns of the bull; removing his cap, he pronounces the following prayer, "Oh Aphi, master of thunder, lightning, and rain! have pity on your people. Our harvests have dried up, the grass is withered, our livestock perishes from want of feed, and therefore /51/ death from hunger threatens us. Command the rain-clouds to gather, command the thunder to peal, the lightning to flash, and send us rain to save the perishing people." The participants say "Amen," and the sacrificial animal is killed and its meat cooked. After all the dishes, made from ingredients brought with him, have been pre-[533] pared and laid out on mats, the old man who said the prayer repeats it, and then, with the singing of a hymn in praise of Aphi, the feast begins. This hymn is called Anchva ryshva and is sung in honor of Aphi, not only at feasts, but also [821] during thunderstorms. In the first instance, it is sung with thankfulness for the gifts that are enjoyed, in the second, to move Aphi to send good weather. During the feasts, one 782 731 574 of the elders usually addresses a speech to those present, reminding them that all they are then enjoying comes with the blessing of Aphi and suggesting that they thank him. Then

/51 cont./

782 731 574 one of those present begins to glorify the god: "Anchva dukhva zlyphkha khkhaura!" "O you who descends from heaven with lightning and ascend to heaven with thunder, who knows the number of the stars in heaven and of the sands at the bottom of the sea ..." etc., and he concludes the poem with the words, "akhdau." All those present, divided into two groups, repeat every line of the hymn in turn, always three times over.

782 821 The killing of one of the herd by lightning unfailingly evokes prayer to Aphi; on the other hand, if he is not appeased by sacrifice, a repetition of his visit must be expected. The owner of the dead animal invites the inhabitants of the village, without distinction as to age or sex. On the spot where the animal was killed, a tower is built about one and a half sagene in height, so that beasts of prey cannot climb it. All those present surround the killed animal, join hands, and dance, half of them singing "Voetla" and the other half answering "Chaupar," and they raise the animal onto the tower, still singing and dancing, and leave it there as a victim for the birds of prey. Then the owner of the animal killed by lightning sacrifices a bull to Aphi, at the same time thanking him for the present visit and begging him nonetheless to spare him future visits. Various dishes are prepared from the meat of the sacrificed animal; bread, cheese, and wine are brought, and those present feast all day long at the expense of the man who suffered the loss. The day the animal was killed by lightning becomes so memorable in the family that has thus been visited by Aphi that neither the head of the family /52/ nor his children will give anyone anything on the anniversary of that day, saying that they expect a visit from Aphi on that day.

[527] [931] [766] The same ceremony is performed when a person has been struck by lightning. During the dance around the corpse, none of the relatives of the dead man dares to weep; otherwise all the participants will be struck dead by a thunder-bolt.

/52 cont./

821 766 "Recently," writes Mr. Giorgidze in the newspaper Iveriia of 1888, "a man was being buried with laments and sobbing. At that moment two bulls grazing nearby were struck by a thunderbolt and immediately the crying and sobbing turned into dancing and singing, "Atlarchouph." The dead bulls were lifted up and placed on a tree, and the deceased was buried in a deathly silence."

The corpse of a person struck by a thunderbolt is placed in a coffin, put on a tower, and left there until nothing but his bones remain; the coffin is then taken down and buried with the normal burial ceremonies and the celebration of the funeral-banquet established by custom.

175 764 [766 821] It was probably this custom of such placing or suspending of the corpses of those killed by Aphi that led the ancient Greco-Roman writers and the geographer Vakhushti to state that in Abkhazia and Colchis dead men were not buried, but their corpses hung in trees. These are Vakhushti's words: "Though Christians by creed, the Abkhaz do not know their religion and are therefore considered to be idolaters. And indeed, instead of burying their dead, they dress them in their best clothes and weapons, lock them in boxes, and place them in trees." Apollonius Rhodius (250-200 B.C.) wrote of Colchis, "Many grapes and willows grew there, from the tops of which corpses of the dead were suspended by chains. Even now the inhabitants of Colchis consider it a crime to burn corpses of men or even to bury them and cover them with burial mounds; they are put in undressed hides of bulls and suspended from trees far from the city. But the earth as well as the air gets its own, for the corpses of women are buried in it; such is their law" (1). The same thing is

[113]

1. Greko-Rimskiie pisateli o kavkaze /Greco-Roman authors on the Caucasus/, by Gen, pt. 48.

attested in Variae Historiae: "The Colchi put their dead in hides, sew them up and hang them on trees" (2). Nymphodorus

/52 cont./

2. Ibid., p. 162.

195 764 of Syracuse (who lived about the middle of the fourth century B.C.) said /53/ that "it is not accepted among the Colchians either to bury or to burn the corpses of men. They put these corpses in fresh animal-hides and hang them on trees. They commit to the earth the corpses of women, however, ... They venerate heaven and earth above all" (1).

1. Ibid., p. 208.

20.

Shasha

326 796

Under the name of Shasha the Abkhaz understand the inventor of the craft of the smith. They say of him, "Shasha khe ah-dou," which means, "Shasha, the great lord of trades." Shasha or Shash was the first blacksmith! He picked up the red-hot iron, not with tongs, but with his hands, and he forged it, not on an anvil, but on his knees. He is the inventor not only of the craft of the smith, but the inventor-patron of 363 other crafts as well. The smithy with all its appurtenances is the image of Shasha (2).

2. Iveriia, 1888, No. 186.

[782] [796] [414] Prayers are offered up to him on New Year's Eve, and the most complete of the ceremonies to him is held by the blacksmiths and the locksmiths.

782 326 On New Year's Eve the master of the house kills either a calf or a ram, and his wife kills a rooster for each member of the family and prepares a pie of wheat-flour and fresh cheese. The livers and hearts of all the slaughtered animals are roasted separately; for this, instead of a spit, a stick from a young nut-tree is used. When the food is ready

/53 cont./

782 and has been brought into the smithy, the blacksmith puts
326 all his instruments on the anvil; a brazier with coals is placed nearby and the whole family kneels down around the anvil. After taking off his bashlyk and his belt (as proof that he addresses Shasha with an open heart and mind), the smith lights a wax candle, throws incense on the coals of the brazier, and prays to Shasha to bless him and his family with good health and long life, and to make the instruments forged from iron do him good rather than harm. After all those present have pronounced "Amen" at the end of the prayer, the master of the house cuts pieces of the pie and of the organs roasted on the nut-wood spit and throws them on the brazier with the words: "Until that time when I am unable /54/ to feed with these little pieces all Shervashidzi and Anchabadzi, let no one in my family fall ill. I pray to you for this, Shasha, bringing to you a real sacrifice." The smith then cuts off just such little pieces from the other sacrifices and distributes them to all the members of the family, who eat them and wash them down with three swallows
[273] of wine. The host designates the wine for this repast immediately after the harvesting of the grapes and saves it in a separate jug called shĕsher gaphshi, buried in the smithy itself; under the fear of punishment by Shasha, no one dares to touch it, even in any extremity, before New Year's Eve, neither the host himself nor, all the more, one of the bystanders. Upon the completion of the praying, the prepared dishes are transferred to the house of the smith, where the neighbors gather and feast to the glory of Shasha until dawn.

782 Several princes also offer a prayer to Shasha on New
796 Year's Eve, in which case each of the persons present, having
565 been at one time dependent on these princes, brings a rooster. Shasha is one of those divinities called upon by the Abkhaz more often than others.

796 According to the understanding of the Abkhaz, the divinity whose name is called falsely immediately punishes the guilty one by those means or tools which are in the field of his specialty. Thus, for instance, one who has called

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796 falsely the name of Aphi, who commands the thunderstorms, cannot be punished by means of firearms or side arms, which make up the specialty of Shasha, etc.

782 326 Oaths to Shasha are of two kinds: in the smithy and under the open sky. In the first instance, the smith, having placed the hammer on the anvil and crossed his hands on his breast, stands to one side of it, the one swearing the oath on the other side of the anvil, opposite the smith, and the one concerning whose affairs the oath is being sworn stands to the side. The one swearing the oath, having taken the hammer into his hands, says: "If I am guilty of that of which they accuse me, then may Shasha smash open my head on the anvil"; upon these words, he hits the anvil three times with the hammer, and the oath is considered sworn. In the second 782 instance, two sticks are driven into the ground, one opposite the other; on them are hung loaded rifles whose muzzles are trained on the space occupied by the one swearing the oath; those present stand to the side. The one swearing the oath pronounces, "If I said a lie, may Shasha shoot bullets through my head /55/ from these rifles," and he walks through the space between the rifles three times.

755 787 326 At the first sign of sickness accompanied by headaches, the person who has taken a false oath asks his relatives to find out from a female fortune-teller the cause of his ailment. [787] The fortune-teller, who has usually heard beforehand, from the blacksmith himself about everyone who has taken an oath, throws some beans and looks at the stars, and then indicates the cause of the sickness: a false oath sworn to Shasha on such and such a day, in connection with such and such a matter, and in such and such a smithy. One of the ailing person's relatives goes to the person concerning whose affairs the false oath was sworn and by gifts induces him to pray to Shasha to forgive the patient, promising, of course, that upon recovery the patient will give him complete satisfaction. Then they both go to the smithy where the oath was taken, and the

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755 782 326 sick man's accuser, taking off his belt to bear witness to the sincerity of his address to Shasha, approaches the anvil and utters a prayer in which he requests Shasha to deliver the guilty one from his ailment, with a pledge that after his recovery the sick man will come himself to beg for forgiveness from Shasha; then, leaving a piece of iron in the smithy, he goes to set the patient's mind at reast. If the sick man recovers, he satisfies the injured one and goes with him to the smithy, and, having put a small silver coin (no less than two rubles) on the anvil, thanks Shasha for his recovery; the ram, the bread, and the wine that he has brought with him are given to the blacksmith, from whom, after the prayer, he receives pieces of the ram's liver and heart; he sends these to his family as a token of Shasha's forgiveness. In company with his relatives, the injured party, and the blacksmith, he himself eats the food that was brought along in the blacksmith's house.

21.

The Prayer to Eyrig-aatsnykh

579 782 [776] [778] Eyrig-aatsnykh is the patron of stealing, plundering, and robbery. Beyond the river Bzyb this deity is called Chugurukhnykh; all the Abkhaz setting out to steal among the Ubykh, Shapsug, and other mountain-dwellers used to bring offerings to Chugurukhnykh, whose altar, if this expression may be used here, /56/ was located on a cliff beyond the fortification of Gagra. Prayers to this god are offered only by those who practice the "arts" of which he is the patron. An offering of four cone-shaped loaves of bread is brought; a prayer is said over them, asking a blessing upon the enterprise and giving a promise to sacrifice something else to the god in case of success. The loaves of bread are taken along on the trip. The thank-offering consists of something of the stolen goods, and if a horse or a head of cattle is taken, the sacrifice consists of a lock of the stolen animal's hair;

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579 782 all this is hung on trees near the place where Eyrig-aatsnykh is believed to have his permanent abode.

22.

Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh

776 Anybs-nykha-dudryuphsh is worshiped as the mightiest [778] of the gods. Mt. Dudryuphsh is regarded as his abode. Those who dare to climb this mountain are immediately punished with blindness; therefore prayers and sacrifices to this deity are offered at the foot of the mountain. As a deity, Anybs-nykha has no exclusive, professional field of authority, but he is worshiped as higher and mightier than all the other gods. [782] The arrangement of prayers and sacrifices to him is the same as to Sha-sha, with the difference that when an oath is taken in his name, the formula is "May Anybs-nykha send me blindness and every ailment . . ., "etc.

778 [923] Anybs-nykha's residence is under the exclusive supervision of the large Abkhaz family Ankhaĕ-Chichba. The Chichba have enjoyed this right for several generations; it is a source of great profit to them, since permission to bring sacrifices to this deity must be bought from them with presents. Not far from the top of Mt. Dudryuphsh, the actual abode of Anybs-nykha, a stone lies under an oak; on this stone the image of the Holy Virgin has been carved. All those who [782] take an oath must put a coin or something metal under this stone, and woe to him who is tempted to take anything away, even one little thing, from among the objects lying there!

23.

/57/ Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve

782 [796] [262] On Christmas Eve in every family chickens are killed and four kvakvari (small loaves of bread stuffed with cheese)

/57 cont./

[782] [796] [262] are made for each member of the family. The chickens must be fried and the kvakvari baked before cockcrow. Just after the first cockcrow the master of the house puts bowls on the table, into each of which he puts a chicken and four kvakvari; to each one he fastens a wax candle. A brazier with coals is placed near the table. All the members of the family kneel down around the table, each opposite his bowl, [789] and the eldest person in the family, after removing his cap and throwing incense in the brazier, asks God to preserve him and his family from stomach disorders. After the prayer, all rise, turn to the right, and bow to the east; then everyone eats his portion, and each does his best to finish the meal without fail before dawn.

On New Year's Eve, after supper, a prayer is again [796] [262] offered in each family to ask for all sorts of blessings. For this occasion a rectangular pie is prepared, stuffed with cheese; this is put on a board to which a wax candle is fastened. The whole family kneels around it, and the eldest in the clan throws incense on the coals and says the prayer; then the pie is eaten and the leftovers burned on the coals. This prayer is called Kalinda. On the first day of the New Year the prayer called Gunykhva (prayer of the heart) is offered. For this, a small loaf of wheat-bread stuffed with an [262] egg is prepared for each member of the family. The head of the family raises a loaf to the breast of each member, praying [789] to God to preserve them from heart ailments. After the prayer, each one eats his loaf.

24.

Drought

731 789 During a severe summer drought all the village girls gather in their best attire near the river. They divide themselves into three groups and make a raft of branches, cover this with straw, and make a doll, which they then dress up as a /58/ woman. When all these preparations are finished, a

/58 cont./

731 donkey is brought, which they cover with a white sheet and
789 put the doll on it. One of the girls takes the donkey by the rein, while two others support the doll, and they set out for the place where the raft was made. The other girls accompany the procession on both sides, singing "dziva dziva
[539] dzvari! Kva kva mykryld aphsh-akh ipha did shivait dzy khychik, dzy khuchik," which means, "To get water, water! To get rainwater; a red daisy! Son of the Lord, we thirst for a little water, a little water!" When they come to the river, they take the doll from the donkey, put it on the raft, and, setting the straw afire, let it float downstream; they then try to chase the donkey into the water, which, of course, requires no small effort. At last the donkey is dragged into the river, and, emerging on the opposite bank, he begins
[825] to bray, which is considered the surest sign of forthcoming rain. If, however, the donkey fails to bray, the same ceremony is repeated anew on the following day or the next day after that.

25.

Saints

776 Independent of the general worship of all the deities dis-
778 cussed above, the inhabitants of the villages of Lykhny,
[184] Lzaa, and Ilori are under the protection of saints, to whom the churches erected in those villages are dedicated; or, more correctly, who are under the protection of the churches themselves. In Lykhny each family invokes the protection of Anan-Lykhnykh (the Virgin Mother of Lykhny), in Lzaa, of Anan-Lzaanykh (the Virgin Mother of Lzaa, i.e., the cathedral of Pitsunda dedicated to the Holy Virgin), in Ilori, of Tsminda Giorgi (the cathedral of St. George). To invoke
782 their protection, sacrifices must be offered, which are, in
[796] fact, brought by each family once a year on a Sunday evening.

[231] On the day set aside for the offering, the best year-old

/58 cont./

782 231 heifer is selected from the herd, and in the evening it is brought into the house where the family that is invoking the church's grace has its permanent residence. A supper is prepared, consisting of cooked or roast mutton, and the whole family washes and puts on clean linen. The head of the family takes a wax candle in one hand and in the other the rope tied around the calf's neck; he addresses the /59/ cathedral with a prayer for his protection and that of his family; he states that the calf will be dedicated to the church and that all its male offspring will be sacrificed to it, and that, instead of heifers, rams will be sacrificed. After this prayer an incision is made in the calf's ear; from this time on it is considered inviolable and cannot be used for food. On the day of its dedication to the cathedral the calf must spend the night in the house with the family.

782 778 If an inhabitant of one of the three above-mentioned villages moves away, he is obliged to bring an offering each year to the cathedral in the village of his birth. Girls from these villages who marry inhabitants of other villages are not exempt from this rule. They as well as their children are still regarded as under the protection of the cathedrals of Lykhny, Pitsunda, or Ilori and are therefore obliged to offer sacrifices to them.

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539 /A supplement on pp. 60-64, containing Abkhaz sayings and proverbs, is omitted in the translation; see foreign text./